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CLASH OF THREE EMPIRES

The Author acknowledges his indebtedness to the University of Bombay for the substantial financial help it has granted towards the cost of publication of this work.

CLASH OF THREE EMPIRES

A STUDY OF BRITISH CONQUEST OF INDIA WITH
SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE MARATHA PEOPLE

By

V. V. JOSHI, M.A., (OXON.)

Foreword by

SIR SHAFAT AHMAD KHAN

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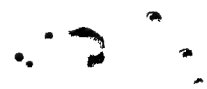
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TO
THE SACRED MEMORY
OF
MY MOTHER



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FOREWORD

I have read Mr. V. V. Joshi's work on the "Clash of three Empires" with great interest. It is a very able interpretation of the data on the subject, and gives a lucid and clear analysis of the basic elements in the growth of the Maratha state. Indian scholars have not yet attempted a philosophic study of the causes that ushered in the great epic movements which have uprooted the pattern of their national life, not once, but on numerous occasions. The new school of Indian historiography is probably too busy collecting data, analysing their implications, and assessing their worth, to find time for the synthetic study of the material. Views may differ on the function and scope of historical research. I have always held the view that the function of a historian is not to pass judgments on the motives and mainsprings of great personalities; but to study dispassionately and in a scientific spirit, the material collected by the historian and to record the facts exactly as they occurred. I belong and have belonged, to the school of Ranke and believe profoundly in the archive method followed by his successors. On the other hand, it is only fair to state that there

is a vigorous section which regards this interpretation of the rôle of historical criticism as too narrow and points triumphantly to conceptions which hold sway in many leading countries at the present time. Their view of history is dynamic, and they are eager to apply the lessons of history to contemporary problems. I do not think that the difference in the viewpoint is substantial, for after all, history from the nature of the case is not dead matter, but is a living, pulsating and active force, linking up the most modern movements with the creative energy of the past. The real difference in the viewpoint of the two schools of thought emerges precisely at the point where interpretation ends and judgment begins. There may be other permutations and combinations in the process, but, on the whole, it will be safe to say that the two methods are simply two aspects of the same principle, and it is only emphasis and the mode of treatment which gives point to the one method or the other.

Mr. Joshi's book belongs to the second category, and as such it ought to be welcomed by all historians. It does not aim at providing fresh material on the subject; nor does it supply a critical apparatus for the study of the sources. It should be classed as a philosophy of Indian history in which the formative forces that have moulded Indian history during the period covered

by it are discussed with great ability and insight. It should, therefore, be ranked as a work on Indian sociology. It gives a very clear and lucid analysis of the factors that moulded Indian history in the eighteenth century and synthesises our views of the problem in a way which is often ignored by dry analysts and dull chroniclers.

Mr. Joshi's thesis is that "Indian historical development shows that perpetual war goes on in the country unless either a foreign power conquers the land, or a power rises in India itself which subdues all others" (pages 73-74). He asserts "that the British power in India evolved through the latter half of the eighteenth century with the strongest military power, until by the end of the century, the British possessed almost the monopoly of military power in India" (page 41). Again Mr. Joshi contends that "due to the inexorable facts of geography and the military nature of Indian governments, the strongest military power had to expand until it either subdued the entire country or was broken in the attempt." He says further that "states in India that lose their dynamism soon sicken and die." Mr. Joshi's quotation from John Katz's work, *The Will to Civilisation*, on pages 576 is ominous, and Indian readers will shake their heads and ask if Katz does not grossly distort certain features of our national growth. Readers will find Chapter II of Mr. Joshi's book

particularly interesting, and will appreciate the ordered lucidity of the author and the clarity and precision with which the central principle is developed. Many people will agree with the author's contention that the attempt of Shivaji to found an independent kingdom would have altogether failed but for the pervasive influence of Maratha nationhood, which demanded political expression. Mr. Joshi then discusses the forces that facilitated the process and mentions, among other causes, the unity created by a common language and the reform movement in the religious and social sphere as a result of the self-consciousness of the Maratha people. He contends that the Maratha power owed its rise to the decay of the kingdom of Bijapur on account of the constant pressure which the Moghuls had employed against it.

Readers will be particularly interested in the statement on page 22 that the Maratha Empire spread rapidly into Central India and Bundelkhand because they (Marathas) were welcomed to a great extent by the population of the invaded countries. The Rajputs, however, helped them only so long as the Marathas did not establish themselves in Central India and northern territories, "and their sullen indifference during the Panipat campaign showed that they were disillusioned with their deliverers." Some people may object to Mr. Joshi's sweeping generalisation on p. 24 that

the change of the Maratha nation-state into the Empire, was "misfortune of Maharashtra, because by this change the Maratha State lost its national characteristic." It may be contended on the other hand, that the Empire was the only effective expression of the Maratha desire for expansion. Mr. Joshi admits that the peasant movement was amorphous, leaderless and, was therefore, barren and futile. It needed new channels for its energy and the shape it assumed was necessarily and inevitably that of an empire. It contained in its bosom ineradicably hostile elements which were ultimately bound to indulge in a species of mutual destruction. The early Peshwas tried to guide and control the direction of the new Empire and had a man of commanding intellect and character appeared in the formative stages, he might have succeeded in directing the Empire into healthy channels. But the emergence of self-reliant and vigorous men, who quickly grasped power and attained leadership, made the task of the Peshwas not only difficult but impossible. The early Peshwas were undoubtedly men of great organising ability and they built up a framework of government which bore the strain of nearly half-a-century of wear and tear with comparative success. It may indeed be said with perfect justification that the Marathas were too busy founding empires, carving out principalities, and destroying an old and

decayed edifice to find time for a well-knit administrative machinery, articulated to the needs and desires of a loose confederation which sprawled from a point on the extreme south of India to the farthest point in the north. Hence it may be contended that the essential work of the new Maratha Empire consisted in the removal of the débris of the past, and great constructive undertakings and positive achievements are possible only when peace and tranquillity have been achieved in the country. The Mahrattas had, however, no time to think, as they were constantly called upon to act throughout the eighteenth century. There is considerable force in this argument and similar reasoning could be applied to Ranjit Singh's administration. The Maratha Empire, however, developed a higher code of administrative efficiency, and within the limits assigned to it by the circumstances of the period, it may be said that it was perfectly definite, perfectly intelligible, perfectly consistent and a wholly lucid and clear expression of the Maratha race. It is unfair to compare and contrast it with the highly developed conception of a modern civil service, which has wrought so many changes in European countries and in India. That the Marathas failed to achieve the unity of a coherent nation in the eighteenth century was due partly to the commercial cynicism of its group leaders, who sprang into fame in this period of

anarchy and disorders, and partly to the absence of a commanding personality among the later Peshwas. Even the early Peshwas showed no creative imagination, and though vigorous, efficient and self-reliant, they lacked the vision which distinguished Shivaji. As they lacked initiative forces in their policy, so in their political systems they ventured on no fresh beginning. In Shivaji they had an idea for their rallying point, and the shadow of his name still abode with them in Poona. After Panipat, however, many branches of the Mahratta Confederacy, strained to the cracking point by the tension of party spirit, were isolated from the organism and developed into semi-independent kingdoms. The situation demanded the strenuous efforts of a man of genius, who could reunite the scattered forces into one system or absorb them in himself. The history of the Maratha confederation in the last quarter of the 18th century is the history of changes effected by a succession of mutually hostile parties, each in its own interest subverting the work of its predecessor, and each in turn relying upon factions and partisans in Poona. The division between Scindia and Holkar introduced a vital discord into the confederacy, while the subordinate quarrels, which smouldered among the different sections of the population, tended to deepen the gloom. Of all the statesmen of this period, Nana Farnavis was the only person

who had both vision and practical ability to guide skilfully the policy of his nation. "With him" wrote Captain Palmer, the British Resident in Poona, "departed all the wisdom and moderation of the Maratha government". He succeeded in maintaining a stubborn front to the enemies of the Confederacy and to him alone was due the credit for successfully resisting the attempts of the Bombay Government, allied with Raghoba, to force their protégé on Poona. In simple strength of character he was unsurpassed by any of those celebrities to whom their respective countries make obeisance. Of other men of this period mention may be made of Jaswant Rao Holkar, who preferred strong deeds to ordinary morals, and indulged in delirious cruelty on occasions which gave a foretaste of a disordered intellect. Mahadji Scindia was cast in a different mould and there is something great, even noble, in the way he built up his power in the North, and organised a state which exists to the present day. While Holkar's uncompromising career was a continual war, Mahadji combined martial ardour with a singular aptitude for state-craft. While he reproduced in the initial stages, the mental architecture of Poona among the races of the North, he was shrewd enough to take on the colour of his surroundings and adapt himself to the changed proportions of his northern territories with the supple

grace which was the secret of his success. A network of diplomacy embraced his widely scattered empire, and round the chief captain were grouped subordinate commanders, like satellites around the luminaries of a solar system. Mahadji's "protection" of Shah Alam gave him ample justification for superintending the decayed Moghul Empire. The "white peace" towards which Shah Alam's mind had been travelling, was still a blacker thing for the poor, effete Emperor, for it spelled abdication from the role which three centuries of genius and fiery purpose had assigned to the Moghul Empire.

Mr. Joshi develops with great ability and vigour some very important points on pages 25-31, and I am inclined to think that he has succeeded in marshalling very cogent reasons in support of his thesis. Mr. Joshi's contention is that the system of warfare adopted by Mahadji Scindia, was not suited to the genius of the Maratha people, and their neglect of cavalry proved fatal to their designs. Arthur Wellesley (later Duke of Wellington) has given forcible expression to this view. I am inclined to think this theory has been pushed too far and we are not justified in regarding it as the sole justification for the disaster to Maratha armies. There is a difference of opinion on the subject and the battles of Assaye and Argaum do not confirm the soundness of the doctrine. At Assaye the

Maratha guns were extremely well-served, and in the beginning they created a havoc in the ranks of their opponents. In fact, two factors contributed to the decisive victory of the British. Had Pohlman's brigade done its duty, the position of the British would have been in great jeopardy. I am inclined to agree with Fortescue (*History of the British Army*, Vol. V) that Pohlman's conduct throughout the day bore strong marks of treachery to his master. In the second place, the Maratha horse which by a little energy and boldness would have ensured the victory to Scindia while Maxwell was on the other side of the Juh lost heart and rode off. It may be contended that this shows Scindia's neglect of an arm which was traditionally the main prop of his race. There is some truth in the statement, but it does not by any means prove that the cavalry by itself would have defeated highly disciplined and virile troops of Europe. Let us take the battle of Argaum. The centre and left of the Maratha army were composed of Ragoji's infantry, artillery and cavalry; the right consisted of Scindia's cavalry with a number of Pindarces, who were predatory horsemen. The regular infantry about ten thousand strong was drawn up with its guns in one line, with a small body of foot in the rear. Scindia's cavalry were massed into two huge bands, one slightly in advance and the other in the rear of the right

of the first line. The Rajah of Berar's cavalry also took post somewhat in the rear. I have given details of the composition of the Maratha army to show the disproportionate amount of cavalry in this battle. What was the result? The action was sharp and short and the casualties were inconsiderable, and only hundred and sixty-two Europeans and 200 Indian soldiers were killed, wounded and missing. The battle itself did not take much time. As the European battalions arrived within sixty yards of the Maratha army, the latter fired a final discharge of grape into them and a large body of Arabs boldly charged them with sword and buckler. A short and sharp struggle took place, in which the Arabs were beaten back, with the loss of some six hundred wounded and killed and the rest of the Marathas gave way almost immediately. The feeble attacks of the cavalry upon the extremities of Wellesley's line were easily repulsed and then the whole mass of the enemy left the field leaving 38 guns behind them. In this battle too the cavalry played a pathetic role. Had they fought with determination, they could have given considerable trouble to their opponents. But they accomplished little and played an inconspicuous part. There was no neglect of the cavalry arm by the Marathas in this as in other engagements, yet its contribution to the struggle was neither decisive nor vigorous. Let us take the battle of Laswari. We

may regard this a test case, because it engaged the flower of Scindia's regular infantry who were excellently appointed with artillery and were accompanied by four or five thousand horse. Lake admitted that "the enemy fought like devils or like heroes, and if they had been commanded by French officers, the event would have been, I fear, extremely doubtful. I was never in so severe a business in my life, and pray to God, may never be in such a situation again." Many of the battalions had been trained by De Boigne and as the leadership was excellent, they acquitted themselves creditably. Fortesque says that "the Maratha Commander fought a splendid action and his men covered themselves with glory. In this battle it was the trained and disciplined infantry that covered itself with glory." It may be pointed out on the other hand that Jaswant Rao Holkar's defeat and destruction of Col. Monson's troops was an ample vindication of the traditional policy of the Marathas. To this it may be replied that Monson committed a series of egregious blunders of which few officers could have been guilty. Had these operations been conducted after the rains the prospects of victory would have been greatly improved. As it was the conjunction of two most unenterprising officers in India, Murray in Gujrat and Monson in Kotah, who ought to have met and could not, proved fatal. Murray indulged in a series of

marches and counter-marches which stamps him as incurably incompetent. Had Monson possessed enterprise and initiative, he would have launched an attack on Holkar's troops when they were hovering on his flanks. Murray arrived at Ujjain on July 8, the very day on which Monson decided to retreat to the Mokundra pass. Thus both Colonels were engaged in retreat at a time when their junction would have greatly strengthened the British force. As both Murray and Monson were incompetent and unenterprising, Monson's retreat does not prove the soundness of Holkar's tactics, but the incompetence of Murray and Monson. This was confirmed by their inefficiency in subsequent engagements. Again the rapidity of Holkar's marches in Hindustan were matched by Lake's army and Lake gave him no rest. A graphic account of his army will be found in Major Thorn's "*Memoir of the War in India*." Major Thorn was Captain of Twenty-Fifth Light Dragoons, and has given a vivid account of Lake's army, its astonishingly rapid movements in pursuit of Holkar, and Lake's remorseless energy. I have compared the time taken by Lake in traversing the torrid plains of the North in the worst months of the year, with that occupied by Holkar, and I find that in celerity of movement, fertility of resource and tireless energy in pursuit, Lake's army was im-

mensely superior to Holkar's tattered, fugitive and demoralised mob. Ameer Khan is also regarded as a great guerilla leader. Let any one follow his pursuit by the British troops in Rohilkhand and he will find how quickly he was chased out of his homeland. Again Wellington's pursuit of Dhondia Bagh shows what thorough preparation and skill can accomplish against the most desperate and skilful guerilla leader.

I feel, therefore, that the criticisms of Mahadji's trained battalions do not take into account one factor which was of primary importance. It was the element of leadership. The real weakness of his army lay in the fact that the Commander-in-Chief was a traitor—Perron was wholly an adventurer and wished simply to take his ill-gotten wealth out of India, by any means whatsoever. He succeeded in his aims at the sacrifice of his reputation and character. The other commander Luis Bourquin, his successor, was a miserable substitute who had been a cook in Calcutta and then a manufacturer of fireworks. Compton goes so far as to say that "there is no more contemptible character among the military adventurers of Hindustan than Bourquin, cook, pyrotechnist and poltroon". Had leadership of Scindia's army been animated by loyalty to their employer and to Maratha arms, De Boigne's trained battalions would have undoubtedly done better. The rank

and file of Scindia's army European officers were competent and energetic, but their generals lacked even the rudiments of integrity and fidelity. I feel that we must take all these factors into account and must not try to build up an imposing fabric upon slender material. Another point which may be urged in this connection is that guerilla warfare is not only useful, but sometimes inevitable, in a mountainous country, but in the plains guerilla tactics can never build an empire. They may and do obstruct the orderly functioning of the administration, but they cannot create and preserve a kingdom. Scindia could not maintain his far-flung territories by keeping up a band of guerillas as he had to fight pitched battles against desperate foes in the sandy deserts of Rajputana, and for this purpose he was obliged to pay attention to all the three arms of his army—infantry, artillery and cavalry. This simply reinforces the sound doctrine that the only strategy that can succeed in land-warfare is the strategy of synthesis,—in which infantry, artillery and cavalry play their proper and distinctive role. A power that relies mainly on the lop-sided development of its cavalry will soon be extinguished. Polish cavalry in the eighteenth as in the twentieth century was justifiably regarded as the flower of the Polish army. But then as now, the Poles neglected both artillery and infantry and have had to pay a heavy price in the loss of

their independence in September, 1939. I conclude that Wellington's theory is not completely true, and neither the traditional Mahratta army nor their guerilla tactics, possessed the efficacy which is ascribed to them.

Mr. Joshi has covered so many points in his able work that I am afraid it will be impossible for me to deal even with one of them in detail. I will, however, deal only with his reference to Tipoo Sultan and his remarks on the policy of the Company in the eighteenth century.

As regards the first, I am inclined to think that Tipoo did better in his first war with the British than in the second. He showed great enterprise and dash, while his qualities as a general came out strongly in his attack on Baillic's detachment. His capture of Bednore on May 3, 1783, was a brilliant example of his methods. Again Tipoo succeeded admirably in maintaining his position against a coalition of his enemies and showed great capacity for administration. In his second war too he showed qualities of a good general, but he pursued an essentially wrong policy in concentrating his attention on the fortification of Seringapatam. Moreover, his artillery and infantry had improved but they had not kept pace with the great changes which had been introduced in European armies. In fact he seems to have become too fond of change, and his innovations in

almost every sphere after 1792, were incessant and bewildering. A man of great creative energy and resource, prone to new ideas, inordinately curious, with inexhaustible energy, Tipoo strikes one as lacking in sound judgment. Had he relied more upon the improvement of his famous Mysorean cavalry, which was the terror of Madras at times, he might have maintained his throne. Wellington was of the opinion that with judicious handling of the troops which Tipoo possessed the British troops ought to have been entangled among the jungles of Bangalore on the day they reached Seringapatam. He showed flashes of genius as in his attack on Stuart, but he did not realise that in swift mobility lay his supreme advantage over the British troops. In his campaign of forage in the first stage of his fight against Cornwallis, he had emerged, on the whole, successful; when, however, he started his campaign of walls and ditches, he failed miserably. He ought to have taken the lesson from the past and improved the familiar Mysorean tactics which had made Hydar victorious in numerous campaigns. He repeated his mistake against General Harris in 1799 and lost everything. Seringapatam, once the bee-hive of industry and commerce and centre of Tipoo's administration is now almost a village, enveloped in gloom and brooding on the memories of its bygone glory. I was in Seringapatam

on March 3rd, this year, and saw Tipoo's mausoleum, his palace, the splendour of the noble mosque, and the place where his body was discovered. Tipoo's end was tragic and it still draws tears from the eyes of numerous visitors to his tomb. Had Tipoo bowed to the inevitable and followed the wise policy of the Nizam, his throne might have been preserved. But he cherished an implacable enmity to his chief opponents and paid dearly for it. Whatever Tipoo's faults might have been, all must admit that he died fighting bravely like a man. It is a testimony to Tipoo's greatness that no man of character, rank or influence in his hereditary dominions deserted him. Sir John Shore's testimony to his ability is no less emphatic. "We know by experience his abilities—he has confidants and advisers but no ministers and inspectors, superintends and regulates himself all the details of his government. The peasantry of his dominions are respected and their labours encouraged and rewarded." E. Moor, in his narrative of the operations of Captain Little's detachment (1794) stated "that when a person travelling through a strange country finds it well-cultivated, populous, with industrious inhabitants, cities newly founded, commerce extending, towns increasing and everything flourishing so as to indicate happiness, he will naturally concede it to be under a form of government congenial to the minds of the people. This is a

picture of Tipoo's country, and this is our conclusion regarding his government." Another writer, Dirom, admits that Tipoo's government though strict and arbitrary was "the despotism of a politic and able sovereign." Beatson has described in graphic detail Tipoo's last war and the capture of Seringapatam. His narrative was written under Wellesley's patronage and is disfigured by a violent prejudice against Tipoo. Beatson says that Tipoo had decided to defend the fort to the last extremity. "He was often heard to say that as man could die only once, it was of little moment when the period of existence might terminate." I may quote here another striking passage from the same author (Beatson, *View of the conduct of the war with Tipoo Sultan*, published in 1800). "The Muhammeddan and Brahmin astrologers apprised the Sultan, that the 4th of May 1799, being the last day of the lunar month, was an inauspicious day; and in the forenoon of that day the Brahmin astrologers waited upon him at the Cullalley Deedy, and repeated the same unfavourable omen. Alarmed by these prognostics, the Sultan went about ten o'clock in the forenoon to the palace and distributed among the Brahmins an oblation consisting of the following articles. To the Shenassees of Chenapatam he gave an elephant, a bag of oil seeds (of the sort named *Til*) and two hundred rupees. To different Brahmins

he gave a black bullock, a milch-buffalo, a black she-goat, a jacket of coarse black cotton, a cap of the same material, ninety rupees and an iron pot filled with oil, and previous to the delivery of this last article, he held his head over the pot for the purpose of seeing the image of his face, a ceremony used in Hindustan to avert misfortune. He then dismissed the Brahmins and desired they would pray for the prosperity of his government which was the more remarkable, the Sultan being a bigoted Mahommedan" (Beatson, page 162). On the whole I agree with Mill that as a ruler Tipoo can bear comparison with the greatest princes of the East, "and that his country was the best cultivated and its population the most flourishing in India." The people of Mysore are industrious, thrifty and law-abiding and if their ruler is enlightened and sagacious, they are capable of developing the resources of their country with the sort of smiling realism that has always been a part of the Mysorean tradition.

Tipoo's fundamental mistakes were two. He knew not compromise or accommodation, and his career was a continual war. Capacity had raised his father to the throne and the struggle by which he had established his dominion had trained him and his son to endurance and daring. Both lived habitually in an atmosphere of peril, which taxed all their energies. Their activity was extreme and

their passions correspond to their vehement vitality. About such men there could be nothing small or on a mediocre scale. Gladiators of tried capacity and iron nerve, employing their first-rate faculties of brain and will and bodily powers, in the service of transcendent egotism, only the hardest could survive and hold their own upon this perilous arena. Tipoo had no real sense of his limitations and was gulled by the empty promises of disreputable Frenchmen who flocked to his Court.

Formed far from the conventional mould, and thrown young on testing times and places, Tipoo could never sympathise with the common sentiments of mediocrity or prudence, but sang, exulted in and exalted the storms in which his family was cradled, or the strife in which it flashed its sword. Faith he had in abundance, but he found the world a place of lesser breeds who obstructed the strong and discovered an inevitable nemesis that would overtake the unfit or the weak. As I watched him in eternal repose in the magnificent mausoleum where he and Hydar are buried, on a sunny day on March 3rd this year, I could visualise a man who joined to immeasurable ambition a genius for enterprise and to immovable constancy a courage which never flinched.

His second fundamental mistake lay in altering the traditional mode of fighting. The Mysore

bullock is superior to other Indian bullocks in blood, strength, energy, quickness of step, staying power and endurance of privation. Tipoo's father had made excellent use of these animals. Wellington's victories in India were due, to a large extent, to his thorough commissariat arrangements and his memoranda on bullocks and similar problems of transport may still be read with profit. Tipoo too made use of his bullocks now and then; but he did not know their true value, and his defeat was due mainly to substitution of mobility, speed and celerity for bastions and ditches.

Mr. Joshi has explained in a series of very clear and lucid paragraphs, the great advantages which the British power possessed over the disorganised and divided counsels of Indian princes. Every one will read these parts of his book with the deepest interest, as Mr. Joshi has treated it very ably and skilfully.

Mr. Joshi thinks that the British acquired sovereignty without much serious opposition. The sovereignty had lapsed and there was no successor to the mantle of Akbar. Again his statement that British conquest was inevitable in view of the military inefficiency and political disunity of India, in the 18th century is unexceptionable. I cannot go into these causes here, in detail, but will content myself with saying that the real causes of the disintegration of India were the lack of a

strong central government that could keep the governors of different subahs in check and maintain unimpaired the basic conception of a national government which was the main contribution of the Moghul government in the days of its prime. That the movement for independence took root in the Deccan was inevitable owing to India's vast geographical extent, her enormous distances and the diversity of her classes and creeds. With the break-up of the central government in the 18th century the conception of a common patriotism and allegiance disappeared, and its place was taken by the conception of loyalty to one's chief, or one's clan. India was now a mosaic state and like the Holy Roman Empire in Germany at about the same time, it consisted of more than two thousand pieces. The German Empire about the same time contained about 1,800 principalities, free cities and other jurisdictions which were semi-independent. The Germans, however, retained their sense of nationality and pride of race. We, however, lost not only the sense of national unity but also national pride and our disunity inevitably led to the conquest of our country.

Lord Wellesley's character and policy have been ably discussed by P. E. Roberts in his brilliant biography which is distinguished for its insight into his administration and its judicious spirit. Wellesley has many points of resemblance

with Lord Curzon. His latest biographer, Mr. Harold Nicholson has analysed Curzon's character, in a series of inimitable phrases. Wellesley's correspondence reveals a strange compound of vanity, pomposity, self-justification and brilliance. His enamelled and statuesque presence, the alternation of his manner between exuberance and icy reserve, his passion for the grandiose in life, and in his despatches, and his astonishing lack of humour are all familiar to us. His predilection for the advancement of his family led to the ribald inquiry by Lord Byron, on a memorable occasion. "How many Wellesleys did embark for Spain, as if therein they meant to colonise?" Again Wellesley's love of magniloquent phrases and the very quality of his classicism exposed him to withering criticisms by his contemporaries. There are men who are able to conceal their outstanding gifts behind a mask of modesty, but Wellesley was not prepared to hide his light under the bushel, but invariably managed to flood-light everything he attempted. Finer natures revolted against his insatiable desire for an English title and would have preferred a more delicate approach in consonance with his august position and dignity. Having determined upon a line of policy, he was never deflected from it until he had seen it through. He comes out badly in his dealings with the Nawab of the Carnatak and with the Nawab Vizier

of Oudh. In his dealings with the Marathas, Tipoo Sultan and the Nizam, he showed consummate ability and vigour. In all his enterprises he was able to enlist the sympathy and evoke the enthusiasm of his subordinates. This is a very great ability in a leader and Wellesley possessed it in abundance. Wellesley, after his return, immured himself in his home, wrapped in leaden misery, resentment and remorse, and London wits poked fun at his too abundant facility, his ardent prolixity, his flaming self-display and his tinsel eloquence. Self-justification was his constant companion and remained with him till his death. Wellesley in London was an anachronism, and was ill-adapted to the changed proportions of English political life, while his intellectual and spiritual rigidity unfitted him for the detachment, the flexibility and the unassuming dignity of a statesman. To argue with Wellesley on any Indian problem was like chasing a man on a merry-go-round while seated on a horse behind him. He had some minor posts in the Cabinet but he never made his mark in English public life. His greatest monument to fame is undoubtedly his work in India and few viceroys showed greater energy, resource and vision in waging successfully great wars which completely changed the pattern of Indian life.

On the whole we are justified in saying that

Wellesley showed superb ability in his dealings with the Company's opponents and he may be legitimately regarded as one of the founders of the British empire in India.

Wellesley had a single-track mind and refused to project himself into the feelings of others and assess these feelings at their due weight. This giant Blunderbore, who carved out a mighty empire in India and secluded himself from the vulgar case of his inferiors by resorting to a formidable icy decorum and frigid scorn subsided into a disappointed, morose old gentleman in England.

I hope that Mr. Joshi's book will be read by a large circle of readers as it brings into one focus the numerous elements of an exceedingly complicated and elusive period of our history.

ALLAHABAD
31st August, 1941

SHAFAT AHMAD KHAN

INTRODUCTION

There are many books written on the subject under review in this book and if mine was a mere re-hash of what has been said earlier, there would have been no excuse to write it. But a large number of books on Indian history are either tendentious and prejudiced or are pure biographies of some historical personages or are labours of that excellent tribe—the parchment-hunters. The first two can not claim to be scientific histories, while the last is only the collection of brick and mortar of history and not the building of it. If history was an accurate statement of events as they actually occurred, writing of history should not be attempted, since we can never know the exact manner in which events occurred in the past. No two witnesses of even ordinary events agree, even though the events may have happened very close to us in space and time. It is even more so regarding the past. There is too much of fallibility, self-interest, prejudice and ignorance in human nature for us to rely upon it for finality in detail.

History ought, therefore, to be a study of the main forces that shaped the general events of a

peoples' political, economic and social life and state the main historical laws behind such a development or decline. If this book in any way furthers the study of Indian History in this light, I shall feel that it has succeeded in its main purpose and has rewarded my ten years labours.

AGAKHAN'S RAINWOOD
BUNGALOW, LONAVLA

V. V. JOSHI

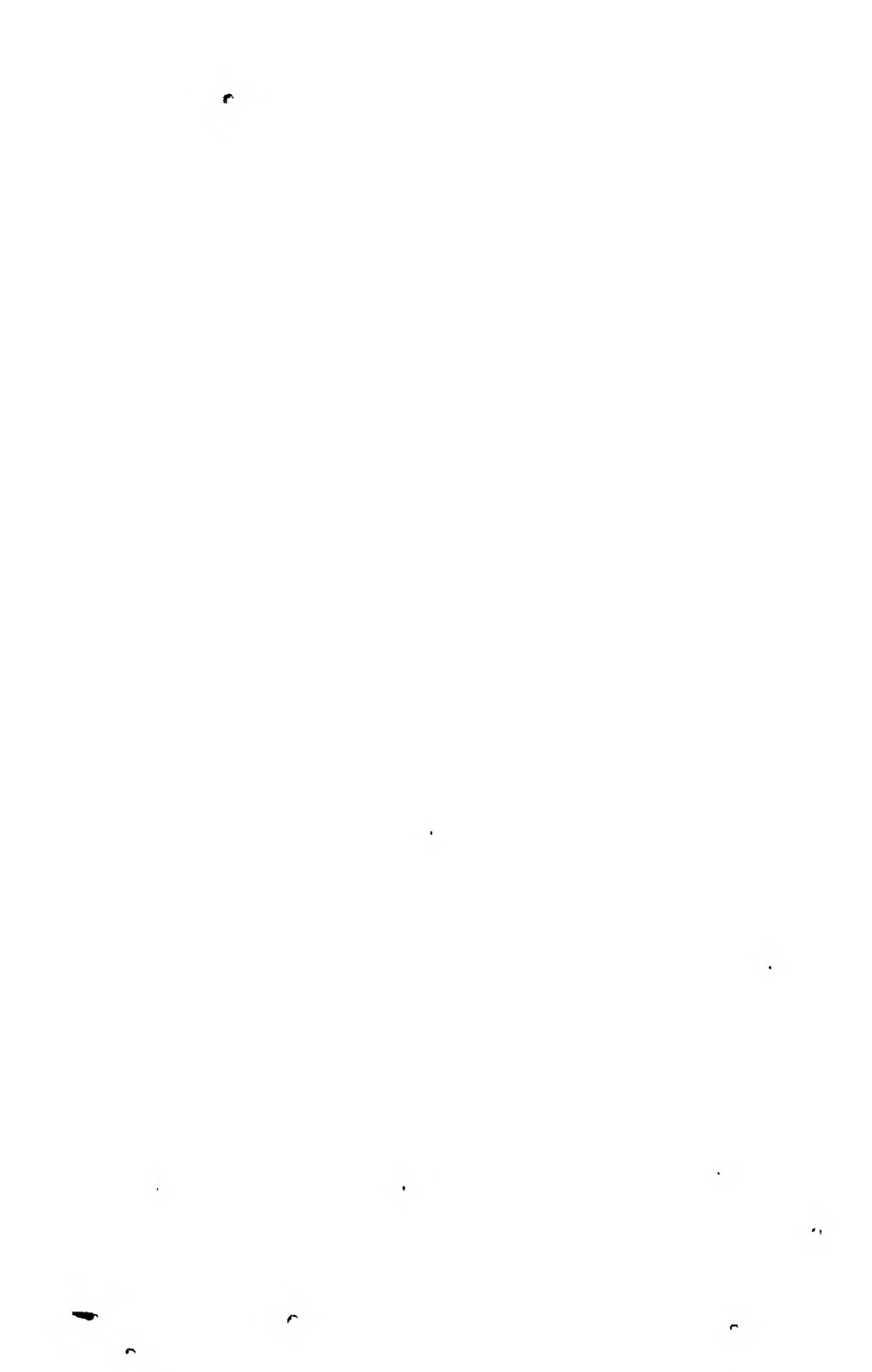
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Above all, I must express my most sincere obligations towards Sir Shafaat Ahmad Khan for writing a Foreword, which not only gives me the blessing of so eminent a historian, but is a full review of my book. He has done me honour in specifying where he frankly differs from me.

Finally, I must acknowledge the encouragement and sympathy of my wife, without which this book could never have been produced.



CHAPTER I

THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

The earnest labours and devotions of scholars has yielded during the last fifty years, a great mass of information regarding the events which took place in India, in the eighteenth century. This was a century full of most diverse events, in which great and historic characters played their part. Indian history during this century is full of tragedy, sensation, romance, treachery, cruelty, heroism, in fact, all the human passions noble as well as ignoble. It was an age of almost continuous warfare in this country. Such a condition had occurred several times before in the long history of India, the land which has been a land of many empires, that arose, matured and decayed through the historic process of time. During the 18th century, one of the greatest if not the greatest of the historic Indian empires namely—the Moghul, fell into a rapid ruin and decay, on whose debris rose the power of the Maratha people, unique in the history of the land. The Maratha power disappeared almost as rapidly as it arose. Finally, it was in the 18th century, that through the great chaos of wars and rumours

of wars rose and grew the almost inevitable ascendancy of the British power. Thus the 18th century was a century of three empires.

No doubt, empires had disintegrated several times in India before and the manner in which the empire of the Moghul broke up, was very similar to earlier disruptions of empires, familiar to Indian historians. The signs of ruin were manifest in the growing weakness of the central government, in the failure of the ruling dynasty to produce really able men, in the tendency displayed by the outlying provinces of the empire to become independent, and in the exhaustion brought through failure in a long and arduous campaign. The Moghul Empire in its fall fully proved the following: "For the Hindu and the Muslim period, it may be laid down as a historical law, that the establishment of a kingdom within the confines of Hindustan, signifies its vigour and compactness and an extension into the Deccan, its dismemberment and ruin."¹ This law was true of all the empires in India and never had the entire country been brought under one rule before the British conquest.

The Moghul Empire was undoubtedly ruined by the failure of Aurangzeb to subjugate the Deccan, after a war of twenty-five years. Its

¹ K. M. Ashraf: *Life and Conditions of the people of Hindustan*, p. 104.

resources were exhausted and the prestige of its army was seriously impaired. "Thus until this day he has not been able to accomplish the enterprise he intended (as he said) in two years. He marched carrying with him three sons, Shah Alam, Azam Tara and Kambaksh, also his grandsons. He had with him much treasure, which came to an end so thoroughly during this war, that he was compelled to open the treasure-houses of Akbar, Nur Jahan, Jahangir, and Shah Jahan. Besides this, finding himself with very little cash, owing to the immense expenditure forced upon him, and because the revenue payers did not pay with the usual promptitude, he was obliged at Aurangabad to melt down all his house-hold silver-ware."¹ The Moghul army lost so much of its fighting efficiency that it feared to accept battle. "These (Maratha) leaders and their troops move in these days, with much confidence because they have cowed down the Moghul commanders and inspired them with fear."² The viceroys in the various provinces acquired the habit of regarding their offices as hereditary and began to assume semi-independence. Worse still the yearly excursions and levy of tribute by the Marathas in

¹ Manucci : *Storia Do Mogor*, Vol. II, p. 255. (Trans. W. Irvine).

² Manucci : *Storia Do Mogor*, Vol. III, p. 505. (Trans. W. Irvine).

the different parts of the country undermined imperial authority. The decline of the Moghul Empire rapidly began at the close of the 17th century and in 1740 its fall was an accomplished fact. For this situation the newly risen Maratha power was chiefly responsible, because it was at their hands that the Moghul Empire suffered its exhausting military disaster. During the 18th century Maratha power was one of the chief factors in India's political life. British challenge for supremacy and paramount power in India definitely began in 1776 and finally succeeded in 1818. Thus from 1718 to 1806 India was "under free-lances". It is generally held that Maratha power was in the process of acquiring paramouncy, but failed on account of the advent of the English. Many historians, therefore, hold that the mantle of Akbar was acquired by the English not from his Moghul descendants, but from the Marathas.

Obviously, the eighteenth century—the century of three empires—is a very important period in the modern history of India. We know to-day thanks to the labours of men like W. Irvine, Sir. J. Sarkar, Rao Bahadur G. S. Sardesai, far more about the historical events and the prominent personages, who took part in these events, than was known twenty-five or thirty years ago. But it appears that the vast array of isolated facts known about this century, are not evaluated as a whole,

in their proper relation to the vast unconscious being through time, of a very large section of the human race living in India. Therefore, we must undertake to study the 18th century, not only with a view to finding out the mainsprings of the rise and fall of the Maratha people by referring to the historical and political events of that century, but we must trace the causes of the British conquest of India, with a view to weighing the value and nature of the resistance offered by the Indians to such a conquest. Only then can we discover some of the historical laws and main tendencies behind the political event in India during the period under review.

The study of the eighteenth century is also valuable from another point of view. The power of the Maratha people, which waxed and waned, before the rise of British power, was a unique phenomenon in Indian history. A detailed analysis of the power of the Maratha people is essential to any study of British conquest of India, not only because the power wielded by these people for a time was over-whelming, and the British had to over-throw this power before they could acquire the empire of India, but also because of two unique characteristics of these people. Firstly, Maratha power was the only one in India which obtained a great sway over the country and at the same time was not of foreign origin. "Epochs of Indian

history have been determined by the appearance from time to time of foreign influences. At the dawn of recorded events is the coming of the Aryans, whose intermingling with the people of India, begot the elaborate social system and the philosophy of life, which we know as Hinduism. For a thousand years it followed the normal human cycle of development and decay and then the Muslims burst upon India, first merely by touching an outlying province but later establishing themselves firmly over the north, founding great states, building mosques to the might of Islam out of the stones of desecrated temples and cleaving the population into two most sharply defined sections, differing profoundly in outlook, in faith, in philosophy, in politics. Lastly, eight centuries after came European influence"¹ Secondly, Maratha power owed its growth and establishment to a formation of Maratha nationality, a sentiment totally unknown in the history of India. This indeed is a unique occurrence and therefore demands a particular consideration.

Finally, we must study the British conquest of India, with a view to finding out the reasons for the overwhelming British success. The conquest of India by Great Britain was an event of epoch-making importance, in the history not only

¹ *The Cambridge Shorter History of India*, p. 481.

of India and Great Britain, but in the history of the world. The prestige, resource and power, which Great Britain acquired through her eastern possessions at once placed her in the forefront of the nations of the world. The conquest was not a freak of fortune nor was it, as some historians would like us to believe, an "act of absent-mindedness." On the contrary it was a deliberate act undertaken by the representatives of the Company in India, in spite of much opposition in England. Marquess of Wellesley, who was perhaps chiefly responsible for establishing beyond doubt the supremacy of Britain in India "never had any doubts as to what he intended to do in India."¹ The deliberateness of British conquest will be clear to any one who reads the letters and despatches of all the principal English personalities, who took a leading part in the shaping of British history. Further it was not a gigantic fraud as a few historians so unscientifically maintain. To give one example, "Lord Wellesley was determined to annihilate or curb the Mussulmans and the Marathas, by force or fraud. This explains his machiavellian policy and occidental diplomacy in dealing with the independent princes of Hindustan. It was by fraud that he made the Nizam and the Peshwa prisoners, deprived the Nawab of

¹ P. E. Roberts : *India Under Wellesley*, p. 4.

Karnatak, the Raja of Tanjor, the Nawab Vazier of Oudh, the Nawabs of Surat and Farukhabad of their territories and by force ruined Tipoo and some of the Maratha princes such as Sindhia, Holkar and the Raja of Nagpur."¹ Such statements are of very little scientific value superficially true though they may be. Firstly, because upto the very end of the nineteenth century, force and fraud were legitimately used in the history of the world as instruments of high national policy. It was, therefore not a monopoly either of Wellesley or of the British in India. The tendency in historical writings to pronounce pontifical judgments on historical events and characters, as if they were acts of personal morality, has done much harm to a proper analysis of the course of development of historic humanity by bringing irrelevant considerations of morality in a sphere, to which they do not properly belong. It is ridiculous, for instance, to indict Wellesley as if he was personally responsible for all the events which took place while he was in India and, therefore, judge his actions in isolation from the broad development of Indian history. Cosmos was to be created out of the chaos of the 18th century, into which India was engulfed in the course of the fall of the Moghul Empire and Wellesley's 'force or fraud' quickened

¹ Basu : *Rise of the Christian Power in India*, p. 310.

the historic process which would necessarily have been achieved at a greater loss of blood and much misery to the Indian people. Secondly, 'force and fraud' in the long run are not by themselves decisive in determining the more permanent creation of historical institutions, unless they were accompanied by other factors of more permanent value. Such statements as the one quoted above are only superficially true because it is possible to overcome or subdue individuals, by "force or fraud," but never a whole people. A whole people may be conquered, if they have lost faith in themselves and have escaped from a will to civilisation, when they may actually prefer a strong foreign rule to the anarchy which may represent their normal political condition. Perhaps that is why India has no historical literature, until we come to comparatively modern times. "History is a memorial of victors, and in India there are no victors, only a wearisome procession of victims. No Indian state has endured. The Indians are the most defeated of all the civilised people of the world."¹ The causes of the British conquest of India, must, therefore, be sought in a deeper analysis of the history of the 18th century. In the long run, historical events are the consequences of the moral state of a whole people, morality being

¹ John Katz: *The Will to Civilisation*, p. 43.

understood in the widest sense of relation between man and man, and the qualities of their political, social and economic organisations and institutions. Without being didactic history gives with an even hand, an irredeemable dispensation. Historical events are not fortuitous occurrences determined by a wayward fortune.

Therefore, since the Moghul Empire was destroyed beyond revival any study of the 18th century in India must answer the following questions:—

- (a) How far was the Maratha imperial ambition feasible and conducive to a permanent greatness of their nation?
- (b) What were the reasons for the almost unopposed success of British arms in India?

CHAPTER II

THE RISE OF THE MARATHA NATION

History of the Maratha people may conveniently be divided into two distinct epochs. The earlier one namely, the Royal period which lasted till the return of Shahu from the Moghul camp, was distinguished by the growth and fulfilment of the Maratha nation-state. The second was the Peshwa period, which ended in 1818, and began with the rise of Balaji Vishwanath as the virtual head of the Maratha state. In this Peshwa period the Maratha state was transformed into an Empire. While the nation-state was responsible for the exhaustion of the Moghul power, the Maratha Empire was built out of the fragments of the shattered Moghul dominions. The unity between these two different aspects of Maratha history is that the Empire was an overflow of the national energies of the Maratha people. But in creating this Empire the Marathas lost themselves as a nation. The Empire was not a logical or inevitable evolution of the basic Maratha movement. It was the consequence of many historical circumstances external as well as internal, as

explained later on. However, the Empire was loose-knit, accidental and without a solid foundation, because though it used the energies created by Maratha nationalism, by its very nature it struck at the mainsprings of national sentiment and thus dried up the vital sources of its own existence. During the second epoch, the sense of Maratha nationality was thrown into the background and soon lost its force. The dynamic energy, which the original national movement had created, continued to live for a little while longer and was used for a broader but chimerical idea of a Hindu India, encompassed in a far-flung Maratha Empire. This transition from a nation-state into an Empire was a very important event and though it increased for a time the power and glory of Maratha arms, it undoubtedly was responsible for their eventual ruin.

This historic rise of Maratha power was due to a sentiment of nationality, which became gradually more and more powerful during the centuries before the advent of Shivaji. It was a slow awakening of a people who became conscious of themselves. The establishment of Maratha political power was a comparatively later growth, made possible by two circumstances. Firstly, the Deccan Sultanates had become weak partly under pressure from the Moghuls and partly through internal decay. The power at these courts particularly at

Ahmednagar and Bijapur had passed into the hands of Maratha noblemen and the Maratha peasantry filled the armies of these kingdoms. The families of Jadhav, More and Nimbalkar etc. not only held high office but were the main support of the Deccan Muslim kingdoms. In this way, the Marathas had already acquired in the Deccan, political power and experience and had received a long and strenuous training in arms as mercenary soldiers. Secondly, owing to the determination of the Moghuls to extend their power over the entire Deccan Peninsula, the Marathas who held high power found themselves in danger of losing it. If the Moghuls conquered the Deccan most of those who did not receive it as a favour would have lost their employment altogether. It was, therefore, imperative that the Deccan, as a whole and particularly the Marathas who were the backbone of the Deccan governments, should offer a united resistance by creating an independent political state, if the Mohammedan kingdoms of the south proved themselves unable to hold their own against the Moghul. Shahaji's repeated attempts to resist the Moghuls by bolstering up the falling Nizamshahi, were inspired largely by thoughts of defence of his own Jagir. The fear of the officers was justified as was subsequently proved by the treatment which Aurangzeb gave to the defeated and to the deserters. "But as experience teaches,

princes delight in getting men to act treasonably to their own profit, but have no joy afterwards in keeping the traitors about their own persons...; the soldiers of Bijapur and Golkonda were also disbanded. God made use of this very expedient of Aurangzeb to counteract his projects. In disbanding the soldiers of those other kingdoms he imagined he was making his future enterprise a certainty. But Sambhaji was thereby only rendered powerful; for although he had no sufficient resources to entertain so many men, he welcomed all who resorted to him and in place of pay allowed them to plunder wherever they pleased.”¹

The young Maratha power had to defend itself against the Moghuls soon after it was founded and the Marathas fought them as foreigners in order to defend their own country. It was a national resistance because it was offered by all the people as one body. Before Shivaji, his father Shahaji, had also fought the Moghuls, but the motive of his resistance was the defence of his own Jagir. He, no doubt, may have entertained thoughts of an independent kingdom in the Deccan, but he relied on the Muslim and Maratha nobility for support in his enterprise and on its traditional loyalty to the southern kingdoms. However, in the days of Shivaji, it was genuine Maratha nation-

¹ Manucci : *Storia Do Mogor*, Vol. II, p. 309. (Trans. W. Irvine).

alism that the Moghuls were contending against, because by that time, Maratha nationalism had acquired political expression. "It was the upheaval of the whole population, strongly bound together by the common affinities of language, race, religion and literature and seeking further solidarity by common independent political existence"¹

The attempt of Shivaji to found an independent kingdom would have altogether failed, had there not already existed a Maratha nationhood, which desired a political existence. The following forces created and cemented the forces of Maratha nationalism:

(a) *The unity created by a common language.* There is no doubt that solidarity is created among a people, who use the same language far more easily than among peoples who use different languages. Communion of minds is achieved through a common mode of expression and through a common medium for the diffusion of culture. Marathi literature began and the language developed rapidly during the centuries before Shivaji. It developed a new dignity by being able to clothe the highest expression of the human soul, which was in earlier ages in India considered to be the monopoly of Sanskrit. It brought together the people of

¹ M. G. Ranade : *Rise of the Maratha Power*, p. 6.

Maharashtra and from Pandharpur, through the pilgrims, the religious revival spread among all the Marathi-speaking people. "Saints and prophets addressed the people both in speech and writing, in their own vernacular and boldly opened the hitherto hidden treasures to all and sundry, men and women, Vaishya and Shudra alike."¹ Sanskrit no longer possessed the monopoly and the life of the spirit could be taught to all men and women of Maharashtra through the Pandharpur pilgrimages." "Men who made pilgrimages to these shrines were drawn to each other by their common knowledge of the Marathi speech and of the doctrines of the Pandharpur saints. In this way, there came into existence the beginning of a national feeling. In course of time the Deccan governments cut off from the recruiting grounds of Afghanistan and Central Asia, began to employ Maratha clerks, Maratha soldiers and Maratha financiers. The Marathi language came to be the language not only of the Ahmednagar officers, but of the Ahmednagar court."²

(b) *Secondly. A reform movement in religious and social sphere making the Maratha people conscious of themselves.* The Maratha people during the centuries before Shivaji, acquired

¹ M. G. Ranade : *Rise of the Maratha Power*, p. 159.

² Kincaid and Parasnis : *History of the Maratha People*, Vol. I, p. 108.

consciousness and dignity as a consequence of the social and religious reform movement which the saints led for the spiritual and social emancipation of the degraded Sudra and Vaishya classes. "The ancient authority and tradition had been petrified... in the monopoly of the Brahmin caste and it was against the exclusive spirit of caste domination that the saints and prophets struggled most manfully to protest."¹ Through the course of the centuries, during which the movement retained its force, about fifty saints flourished. This movement was of a two-fold character. Firstly, it protested against the soul-destroying rigid orthodoxy of the Brahmins, in matters of caste-prejudices and social laws and insisted on the essential unity and equality of human personality. The movement of the saints, though it did not aim at a fusion and unification of the Marathas as a race, wanted to produce a democratic equality and homogeneity among the people of Maharashtra, which the religious aristocracy of Aryanism denied to the lower orders. To-day all those living in Maharashtra are not Marathas, but at the time of Shivaji, the designation was elastic enough to include probably not only the agricultural Kunbi or peasant class, but Dhangars (shepherds), Ramoshis (an aboriginal tribe) and Kolis (fisher-

¹ M. G. Ranade : *Rise of the Maratha Power*, p. 150.

men).¹ This essential homogeneity in diversity was destroyed by the increasing importance of caste-prejudice later. Secondly, the peasantry and the people of the country, by a spiritual uplift raised their tribal gods from fetishes and aboriginal tribal deities, to the position of being equal to the highest manifestation of the god-head that Aryan philosophy could contemplate. The best known among the tribal gods were Khandoba and Bhawani. These gods satisfied the highest spiritual aspirations of the people of the country and their worship exalted these deities, not by a contemptuous stooping on the part of the Aryan priests, to include the tribal deities as rather the lower forms of the same all-pervading Brahman, but by the lower peasant worshippers themselves, who felt the presence and exalting influence of the deities. As Mr. Chaphekar in his essay on 'the work of the saints' says, the sudras (peasantry) before the days of Dnyaneshwar were 'learned, cultured, religious and numerous'. Thus the Dravidians had at last overcome the inferiority imposed on them by Aryan civilisation and re-established a regenerated life of their own religion and culture. The strength of Maratha nationalism consisted in this that "it did not depend on a temporary elevation of the

¹ S. M. Edwards : *Grant Duff's History of the Marathas*, Introduction, p. xiv.

higher classes, but it had deeper hold on the vast mass of rural population.”¹ Very few finer hymns of religious experience have been sung in any language than the beautiful hymns of Tukāram. The Bhakti school was a successful protest and vindication of the Dravidian population for the honour of their gods! The spiritual and literary awakening of the Maratha people, reinforced with a movement for social reform, found a natural expression in political aspirations, on a national basis. Ramdas exhorted the Maratha people to unite and give forcible expression to a wide-spread movement. However, he wanted this unity for a specific purpose. He did not strive towards the emancipation, unity and glory of the Marathas. He wanted to use the energies of nationhood for the mission of freeing India from the Mlenchhas. For him the Marathas were to be united so that the Hindus could be liberated.

The genuineness of Maratha nationalism and the fact that the rise of Maratha power was the expression of a people's political will, is proved by the composition of the Maratha armies. Usually most of the Hindu armies—the Rajput, for example—were recruited from a special caste, whose duty it was to protect and govern society. A Hindu army, therefore, was not only a professional

¹ M. G. Ranade : *Rise of the Maratha Power*, p. 8.

army but was a hereditary institution of the soldier. But the armies of the Marathas were not drawn from any such hereditary professional class. They were recruited from farmers, shepherds and cowherds. It was an army raised from the soil and the country-side, without reference to the martial status of the recruits. Not even the leaders of the Maratha army were of Kshatriya caste. It appears that there was a great dearth of the second or Kshatriya class in Maharashtra. Very few of the high class Marathas are of Kshatriya origin. They have risen mostly from the ranks of farmers. "The Marathas of the upper class are in origin identical with the great agricultural Kunbi tribe and are now differentiated from them merely by the accident of social status."¹ Thus the Maratha army was a national army because it was a people's army, inspired by nationalist ideals. It was unique in this respect compared to any other army produced before in India.

But, besides, the main and basic factor of nationalism, there were other minor causes, which directly or indirectly promoted the rise of the Maratha power. They were as follows: Maratha power owed its rise to the decay of the kingdom of Bijapur on account of the constant pressure which the Moghuls employed against it. In fact,

¹ S. M. Edwards : *Grant Duff's History of the Marathas*, Introduction, p. xlviii.

the Moghul campaigns in the Deccan were directed mostly against the kingdoms of Bijapur and Golkonda, which they were particularly anxious to conquer. Shivaji for a long time was not taken seriously by the Moghuls. Not only that, but his power was suffered to remain and was even secretly approved of by the Moghuls, as a constant sore to the Bijapur kingdom and a source of weakness to it. Besides, Aurangzeb never really intended his lieutenants to conquer the Deccan, so to say, 'off their own bat'. He was afraid that they might become too powerful and a danger to himself. He, therefore, either starved them of troops and supplies or changed the commanders constantly. Many of these commanders like Jaswant Singh or the Royal princes did not intend that Aurangzeb should succeed in the Deccan, and their loyalty to himself, Aurangzeb probably justifiably suspected. Finally, the Moghul generals themselves were not very anxious to conquer the Deccan on their own account and terminate a war by which they themselves personally benefited. In the hundred years that they campaigned in the Deccan, they never achieved much by way of conquest and occupation of the country, in the Peninsula. Except the campaigns of Diler Khan, Jai Singh and Zulfikar-khan, the imperial arms could not show much to their credit by way of military prowess. Bernier, gives the following testimony regarding the atti-

tude of the Moghul generals to the Deccan war. "The truth is that the generals employed against Bijapur, like commanders in every other service are delighted to be at the head of an army, ruling at a distance from the Court with the authority of kings. They conduct every operation, therefore, with langour and avail themselves of any pretext for the prolongation of the war, which is alike the source of their emolument and dignity. It has become a proverbial saying, that the Deccan is the "bread and support of the soldiers of Hindustan".¹

Secondly, it is quite obvious that the genius of their leader was responsible for the rise of the Maratha power. It was Shivaji, who harnessed the moral forces of Maratha nationalism to found a political state. His personal ascendancy was so great that in an age when treachery was so common, not only did he not suffer on that account from amongst his followers, but he was also able to bring out of them so much personal loyalty, as to make them sacrifice their very lives for him and the Maratha cause. This of course does not mean that he was a miracle or the *avatar* of god. Without detracting anything from the great personal qualities of Shivaji, it is but just to consider him the child and symbol of the Maratha national

¹ Bernier's Travels. (Constable and Smith), p. 197.

movement. The great flood of political events that swept over the Deccan for half-a-century after his death soon reduced him to a legend and so powerful was the memory of his name that it cemented the Marathas to steel their utmost against Aurangzeb. Whether a movement brings out a man or a man creates a movement is a nice point so far unsettled, but there can be no two opinions on the point that people generally get such leaders as they deserve.

Lastly, the Maratha state could hardly have been founded without certain military factors being definitely in its favour. Without success in the field, no state can either be secured or established. These military advantages were as follows: (a) *The nature and geographical situation of the Maratha country.* It was far from the central power of those states against which it had to defend itself. The Moghuls particularly when fighting the Marathas, were fighting far from their seat of power and the bases of their supplies, in northern and central India. The Deccan on account of its barrenness and lack of water all the year round, was an unsuitable country to invade with a large army. It was a country where 'large armies starved and small ones were defeated.' The description, which Bernier gives of the kingdom of Bijapur, is applicable to the entire territory of the Deccan. He says: "It should also be observed

that the kingdom of Bijapur abounds almost with impregnable fortresses in mountainous situations, and that the country on the side of the great Moghul territories, is of a peculiarly difficult access, owing to the scarcity both of forage and good wholesome water.”¹ Besides, the mountainous nature of the country made it eminently suitable for defence by forces inferior in number and equipment. Maratha power rose in its infancy in those parts of the Western Ghats, which were isolated from the rest of the Deccan, by enormous forests, great mountains and magnificent valleys. William Tone describes the Maratha country as follows: “A country of great natural strength, interspersed with mountains and defiles, all of which are defended by fortresses that are reserved as depots for treasures or as retreats in the event of ill-success or defeat. Perhaps no country on earth is better calculated for the purposes of a defensive war; so that whatever be the future of the Marathas in the field, we may safely pronounce, that in their own country they will always be impregnable”. (b) *The mode of Maratha warfare*, which was extremely mobile and had not degenerated into predatory excursions, which it did later on. This Parthian system of war was the traditional mode of warfare in the Deccan and had proved troublesome

¹ Bernier's Travels : (Constable and Smith), p. 197.

to the Moghuls even before the rise of Shivaji. It was particularly suited to the genius of the Maratha people, which thrives in individualist action. They avoided the pitched battles in which, the superior equipment, steadiness and weight of the Moghul cavalry would have told against them. They fought a war of movement and surprise. They made surprise attacks, harassed the enemy and avoided general military action. "Shivaji relied for his success on the secrecy and quick execution of his plans. His army was kept in constant readiness to cover the longest distance at the shortest notice."¹ Besides, in every one of these wars, the length of Moghul communications was so great that the Marathas found it easy to cut off their supplies, unless they were escorted by a very strong guard. In fact, pestilence and starvation, due to Maratha tactics in cutting off Moghul communications, was much more effective in defeating the Moghul armies than the prowess of Maratha arms. Shah Alam's disastrous retreat through the Konkan was a result of such methods. "But what Sambhaji did not do by attacking us" was carried out "by the pestilence which raged in the army with such violence that in seven days of its prevalence, every one died who was attacked—that is about one-third of the army. . . . nor was the mortality

¹ Sen: *Military System of the Marathas*, p. 146.

confined to men only; it extended to horses, elephants and camels. This made the air pestilential, and it being a confined route, supplies also failed, and this was like encountering another enemy.”¹ The barren and hilly nature of the country was eminently suitable for the mobile tactics at which the Marathas were expert. The failure of supplies was almost always the chief cause of the failure of the Moghul campaigns.”¹ “He (the Maratha king) has never ceased to disturb the royal army, making new assaults on it from one day to another, engaging it at different points and stopping the delivery of supplies. From this cause there is nearly always great scarcity in the king’s camp and the price of provisions is very high, so much so that one measure of rice weighing no more than 28 ounces has been at times sold for 18 rupees.”² So great were the Moghul losses, that in the execution of Aurangzeb’s designs, there died “in his armies over a hundred thousand souls yearly and of animals, horses, packoxen, camels, and elephants, etc. over three hundred thousand.”³ The Moghul army unused to such tactics wore itself out, because it could

¹ Manucci : *Storia do Mogor*, Vol. II, p. 287. (Trans. W. Irvine).

² Manucci : *Storia do Mogor*, Vol. III, p. 251. (Trans. W. Irvine).

³ Manucci : *Storia do Mogor*, Vol. IV, pp. 96-97. (Trans. W. Irvine).

not get at grips with the enemy. The Marathas maintained themselves and increased their own boldness as well as their valour, by constantly ravaging Moghul territory. The impunity with which these attacks were made undermined the entire prestige of the Moghuls and ruined their government because no government can long continue after losing its prestige. (c) But the backbone of Maratha resistance was found in *the Deccan hill-forts*. These strongholds were not built by the Marathas. They had existed before the rise of Shivaji. Out of the 240 forts which he possessed at his death, only one hundred and eleven were in any sense constructed by him.¹ The great weakness of the Moghul army consisted in its inability to reduce these hill-forts except at a prohibitive cost in men and material. The Marathas did not improve upon the science of fortification. The use to which they put the hill-forts shows that the Moghuls sadly lacked either the means or the science of taking fortified positions. Even in siege operations the Moghul army was very deficient as most of the Asiatic armies were. It took several months and many thousands of casualties before the Moghul army could reduce the well-nigh helpless city of Bijapur. In the war against the Marathas, the defects of the Moghuls arose out of

¹ Sabhasad, p. 148.

the following consideration. The Moghul army consisted largely of cavalry and a few pieces of field-artillery useful only in pitched battles. Bernier makes it clear that the infantry was an inconsiderable part of the Moghul forces. Their cavalry was most suitable in the broad plains of north India, but was quite useless in the hills of the Deccan. Thus the constitution of the Moghul and Maratha armies respectively was such as to make it rare for them to engage in a general action. "The Moghul commanders deemed it useless to besiege the Maratha strongholds; on the other hand, the Maratha commanders feared a pitched battle with the Moghul cavalry. So both armies avoided each other and contented themselves with ravaging the countryside and torturing the unfortunate peasantry."¹ Shivaji occupied the hill-forts with his mobile infantry guards, which numbered one hundred thousand at his death and used his cavalry for its proper function, namely as an auxiliary arm for purposes of scouting, foraging, to cut off the supplies of the enemy and to ravage the enemy territories. The cavalry was most suitable to collect Chouth, which Shivaji was obliged from time to time to collect, because he was compelled to maintain an army larger than his resources could afford. In fact, the Moghuls were in a most pecu-

¹ Kincaid and Parasnis, Vol. II, p. 47.

liar dilemma. Their own cavalry was quite useless in order to occupy the country and to reduce the hill-forts. On the other hand, if they converted it into an infantry and brought large guns, which incidentally they did not possess, in order to breach the walls of the forts, their army became immobile and lost the initiative so vital in all military campaigns. It could be a tedious process to capture each individual fort and to hold it. Even this Aurangzeb tried, but found it difficult to hold these forts, with a sufficiently large garrison to defend them and without at the same time reducing appreciably the effective force of his main army. Any auxiliary cavalry units would have been condemned to inaction, being engaged only in defending the main infantry forces against the surprise attacks of the enemy. The enemy horse, thereby, was left free to ravage the country and cut off supplies with impunity. In short, Moghul cavalry could not reduce the hill-forts and Moghul infantry could not get supplies or stop the ravages of its territory by enemy horse. The failure of the Moghuls consisted in their inability to solve the problem of reducing the hill-forts which were the basis of Maratha resistance. The Moghuls found these hill-forts almost impossible to reduce. It took them months to reduce a single fortress by storm. "Aurangzeb is well aware that if he does not go in person at

the head of his armies, it is impossible to become master of any fortress. To carry on this war he is put to enormous expense, and when all things are reckoned up, many a year he has gained nothing, although he has consumed many men and much money. Nevertheless, he never ceases to push on his purpose, and in this way his conduct is not without profit to Shivaji, who like an able man, succeeds in making use of this persistence, for the advancement of his own interest. At times he is sly enough to let a fort be taken, then, waiting till it is fully provisioned and afterwards fortified, he takes it with even greater readiness than it had ever fallen before. It is true that his troops are very much better, and are more innured to war than those of the Moghul. For, they are Deccani soldiers, who pass for the bravest and the most enterprising in India. It may also be asserted that if the monarch maintains his design of becoming master of all Shivaji's fortresses, he will need before he succeeds to live for as many years more as he has already lived."¹

Thus the formation of the Maratha nation-state was a unique event in the history of India. Its chief claim to nationalism is based on the fact that the peasant people of the country of Maha-

¹ Manucci : *Storia do Mogor*, Vol. III, pp. 305-306. (Trans. W. Irvine).

rashtra, moved by a spiritual awakening, by a religious revival, which was a vindication of their Dravidian heritage and by social reform which brought the people closer, made it possible to establish an independent political state of the peasantry of Maharashtra. It was tolerant towards other religions but was creating a national religion for itself. It did not evince the crusading zeal against Islam, as a motive force, which has been falsely ascribed to it. The religious and social reform movement was so deep and widespread, that not only the peasantry but even the depressed classes produced saints like Chokhamela and Banka Mahar. That it was not anti-Islam may be proved from the fact that this catholic religion of the soil was embraced even by a few Mohammedans. The following question, therefore, must be answered in the negative if it is asked and answered with reference to the Maratha nationality movement, which began before Dnyaneshwar and ended soon after the foundation of the political state by Shivaji. Was the Maratha power a religious reaction amongst the Hindus against the tide of Islam or had the Maratha power any such crusading bias? Was it an attempt to establish a Hindu sovereignty eventually all over India or in modern jargon, was the Maratha Empire a communalistic reaction? There is no doubt whatsoever that Shivaji was a pious worshipper of Bhavani, a Dravidian goddess

and became increasingly so in later life. No doubt religion was a source of personal inspiration to him, but his piety was a purely personal affair and there is little sign in him or in his immediate successors of fanatical intolerance. The fact that several times he had in his service some Mohammedan troops and the respect that he showed to Muslim saints makes it clear that he was no bigot.

CHAPTER III

THE EXPANSION AND DECAY OF THE MARATHA EMPIRE

As soon as the Maratha forces overcame the danger from Aurangzeb's armies, they carried the war into northern India. The nature of the Maratha power as explained in the last chapter, makes it clear that the Maratha power was organised in such a way as not only to baffle the military skill of the Moghuls, but to undermine their power in their own empire, by successful inroads into their territory, which impaired Moghul prestige and resources. These raids into central and northern India led to Maratha imperial expansion. In this expansion, however, the Marathas departed from the tradition of Shivaji, who had only freed "the bulk of the Marathi speaking people."¹ Even the Tanjor campaign of Shivaji was not an exception and he undertook it for a specific reason. "Shivaji's design, therefore, was to win a new kingdom, which would stretch right across southern India from Bednor to Tanjor. Having won it, he

¹ Kincaid and Parasnis: Vol. I, p. 269.

would guard its northern frontier from Moghul attack by a line of forts and extend his conquest as far south as possible. He might then defy the armies of Delhi by retreating before them, until they were so weakened by their endless line of communications, that he might attack them in the field with some prospect of success.”¹ The raids into the Moghul territory which Shivaji carried out, were not a permanent feature of his national military policy. They were an inevitable necessity because he had to maintain a large army which the resources of his own country could not support. This continued to be true for some time after Shivaji. The early Maratha invasions of Central India upto the beginning of the Peshwa period, were due much more to the grand strategy of destroying Moghul resources and the necessity of funds to keep a very large army than owing to any desire to extend the permanent frontiers of the Maratha state. In their first invasion of Central India, the war the Marathas carried on “was evidently against the government and not the inhabitants.”² The type of warfare during all the Royal period was not predatory, because the Marathas “appear at this stage of their power, to have taken a large

¹ Kincaid and Parasnis : Vol. I, p. 253.

² Malcolm, Sir J., *Memoir of Central India, and Malwa* Vol. I, p. 61.

share of their revenue, but not to have destroyed like more barbarous invaders, the source from which it was drawn; for if they had, it could not have recovered so rapidly..."¹ The campaigns of the Maratha armies in Central India and other parts of the Deccan, which were merely a part of the strategic plan of destroying Moghal resources and breaking their communications, or which were in the nature of a counter-attack against Moghul power after it had spent the initial vigour of its great onslaught against the Maratha state, do not represent a permanent departure from the national military policy of Shivaji's nation-state. It was under the Peshwas that a national policy was given up and a new one was adopted. This new policy was imperialist, de-nationalised and opportunist. The immediate reasons for this development were as follows:

(a) The Maratha army had swollen into enormous proportions at the conclusion of the war with Aurangzeb and a number of war-lords with great experience, prestige and power had arisen during the fierce contest, which had lasted about twenty-five years. This enormous and rather amorphous accretion of military power the Maratha nation could not maintain in time of peace. These

¹ J. Malcolm : *Memoir of Central India and Malwa*, Vol. I, p. 61.

men and particularly the war-lords had no occupation in peace-time and could not be absorbed into the civil government of the country. The state was neither strong nor wealthy enough to command the services of these great captains and their numerous armies. These could be paid only by contributions raised in alien territories. Spheres of activity were, therefore, assigned to different war-lords on feudal basis. Dabhades and Gaikwads were given Gujraht and Sindhia and Holkar were sent to Central India. These assignments were made not on territories already conquered but on those that were to be conquered effectively. Thus the vast military energy created in the war against Aurangzeb was directed towards reducing the provinces of the Moghul Empire and incidentally the Marathas started on a career of carving out an Empire for themselves.

(b) The war against Aurangzeb had lasted so long that the Maratha people were almost uprooted from the soil and the peasantry almost forgot the peaceful art of husbandry and took to the more lucrative profession of a soldier. During those twenty-five years, the Deccan was reduced almost to a desert. It was visited by a famine for three years from 1702 to 1704, and was ravaged by a plague. Manucci estimated that two million persons died of sheer starvation and probably he underestimated. It was a desert that Aurangzeb

left behind him, when he proceeded on his journey to Ahmednagar in 1706. "He withdrew to the city of Ahmednagar, leaving behind him the fields of these provinces, devoid of trees, and bare of crops, their place being taken by bones of men and beasts. Instead of verdure all is blank and barren. The country is so entirely desolated and depopulated that neither fire nor light can be found in the course of a three or four days journey."¹ After the withdrawal of the Moghul armies into northern India, it was natural that the Maratha people should try to live by the sword on Moghul provinces, particularly those of Gujrath and Malwa.

(c) The Maratha Empire spread rapidly into Central India and Bundelkhand because they were welcome to a great extent by the population of the invaded provinces. The population considered them as deliverers from the hateful yoke of their over-lords and the Rajputs particularly as long as Raja Jaysingh lived, were in friendly alliance with the Marathas. The defeat of Daya Bahadur and the total destruction of his army was due to the friendly offices of the local population. The rapid and sweeping successes of the Marathas would in fact have been quite impossible, if the Rajputs, who generally held Central India

¹ Manucci : *Storia do Mogor*, Vol. IV, p. 252. (Trans. W Irvine).

and Malwa had chosen to obstruct them instead of helping them. The Rajputs, however, helped the Marathas only so long as the Marathas refrained from exploiting these Central Indian and northern territories themselves. As soon as the Marathas sought permanent occupation, they encountered permanent resistance. The sullen indifference of the Rajputs during the Panipat campaign showed that they were already disillusioned with their deliverers.

(d) The rapid expansion of the Maratha Empire was also due to the fact that the occupation of the conquered territories was both transitory and superficial. This sudden outpouring of Maratha power into the creation of an Empire was symbolised into the transformation of their armies into the celebrated light cavalry, from the earlier national armies of Shivaji, who relied on forts and a 'fleet-footed' infantry and used the cavalry as an auxiliary arm. The armies of the Peshwa upto 1750, and particularly those of the great Baji Rao, who was the chief exponent of Hindu Empire and the designer of the Maratha Empire, had no use either for fortified positions or for an infantry. In this Baji Rao, though, false to the great national tradition of Shivaji, followed nevertheless the general mode of warfare in Asia, in which the invader collected tribute or looted but did not establish his own permanent administration. The Maratha agents

collected revenue, but the judicial administration as well as the maintenance of peace and order, was never effectively undertaken. In short, the Marathas of the Imperial period conquered territories but did not occupy them. In this they showed the inherent weakness of their sway in India. It also explains not only their rapid decline, but also the smallness of Maratha states that survived the British conquest of India. A power with imperial aspirations should have left behind it states of greater magnitude than the contemporary Maratha states. Such power as was theirs could only continue while its military superiority could be constantly and effectively demonstrated. As soon as the Marathas lost their military preponderance at the battle of Panipat, their empire fell like a 'house built on sand'. Maratha forces more often than not resembled Tartar hordes. The Tartars swept over most of the then known world but left no permanent effect on it except the curse of their memory. Like the Marathas they conquered and ravaged but did not occupy. Every year after the harvest gathering, the peasant warriors having no other occupation would collect and pour out into the adjoining provinces for mulk-giri, i.e., conquest and loot. Like a shower in spring, their invasions came suddenly and powerfully but left very little permanent effect behind them. Their mode of warfare consisted in ravag-

ing the territory of the enemy, cutting off his supplies, cutting up his outposts and advanced-guards, making lightning, surprise attacks, but avoiding pitched battles and either in attempting to manoeuvre the enemy out of his strong position into unfavourable ground or in compelling him to surrender out of sheer exhaustion. Baji Rao overcame the Nizam by adopting these classical tactics. It naturally required a training and discipline, which the Marathas had acquired by tradition and experience, and while they stuck to these methods, they remained unbeaten in the broad plains of Hindustan. Maratha power has often been described as a predatory power. This was certainly true of the Maratha Empire, but was untrue of the kingdom, which was founded by Shivaji. To repeat an oft-quoted remark, Maratha power during the early Peshwa period was more suited to destroy an Empire than to create it. A predatory power, besides, hardly ever creates an Empire and never maintains it even if it does. The change of the Maratha nation-state into the Empire, though imperceptible, was very rapid. It was a misfortune of Maharashtra because in this change the Maratha state lost its national characteristics. Perhaps it was difficult to avoid it especially because the internal geography of India compels a state to expand, and to become aggressive if it is militaristic, though it was by no means inevitable.

The causes of this transformation during the half-century between Shivaji and Baji Rao were as follows :

(a) The national movement which flourished among the peasantry and uplifted the people was still based on a profoundly religious feeling, which though progressive in outlook, was unregulated. It was not concentrated into a proper national religious institution and organisation for purposes of direction. In fact, like all peasant movements in history, it was amorphous, leaderless and, therefore, wasted. Another danger of a movement with a religious sentiment as a motive force, was that it was susceptible of being abused for reactionary purposes. This is what actually did happen to the directionless national-religious movement of Maharashtra. It became quickly denationalised and more catholic and was given the character of militant Hinduism.

(b) This reactionary use of the Maratha national movement was all the more easily accomplished on account of the adoption of militant Islam, by Aurangzeb, who by that act did disservice to the political power of his people. He aroused the militant forces of Hinduism among his Hindu subjects. Maratha propaganda against the Moghuls among their Hindu subjects became more pointed and effective and they found many a secret supporter among them. Historical tradition credits

Shivaji with having appealed to mutual religious affinity in his interviews with Afzal Khan's officers and with Jaysingh. The militant Hinduism of the early Maratha state was very effective propaganda.

(c) Ramdas must also be considered to be indirectly responsible for the denationalisation of the Maratha religio-nationalist movement, and its subsequent adoption of Hindu padshahi as a political aim. His agitation and organisation did not bear immediate fruit; but by the beginning of the 18th century it had taken such firm root that Baji Rao was easily able to declare the establishment of Hindu sovereignty in India as the goal of the Maratha Empire. Ramdas had moved all over India and therefore had acquired an All-India outlook, which though broad as far as it went, was definitely reactionary as far as its attitude towards Maratha national movement goes. He was chiefly responsible for the anti-Muslim propaganda in Maharashtra. Through his organisation of monasteries and mendicant friars all over India, he implored that "a great body of people should be united and with all possible effort the Muslims should be struck." Besides, he was a reactionary against the anti-Brahmanical character of the social and religious reform movement. He was a great believer in the sanctity and ultimate equity of the four-fold order of Hindu religion and strongly deprecated

the diminution of the influence of the Brahmin caste.¹ He was thus not the great political revolutionary of the Maratha national movement, but the leader of a reaction, who wanted to use the forces of the national movement for purposes of a catholic, Hindu India. It does not mean that it was an evil intention nor does it prove that the Brahmins were a wicked brood as the foreign historians would like us to believe. The Ramdasi movement was the natural reaction among the cultured classes, with their all-India class-sympathy and vested interests in orthodoxy.² Ramdas mobilised the cultured high-castes in the Deccan to take the leadership to overthrow muslim rule. The passing of the leadership of the Maratha state from the hands of Shivaji's descendants, who were representatives and symbol of the peasant-kingdom, into the hands of the high-caste Peshwas, the symbols of a militant Hindu Empire, was not a superficial Brahmin intrigue but the triumph of the doctrines of Ramdas and an unconscious though unfortunate direction of the Maratha national movement. Baji Rao started his sweeping military campaigns into north India, by arguing that the Moghul Empire had become very weak and if its heart in north India was attacked, the whole Empire would auto-

¹ Rajwade : *Shri Ramdas Samarth (essay)*, p. 38.

² Dasbodh : *Dashak* 15; *Samas* 2; *Verses* 2-10 and 26-27.

matically come into Maratha hands. Baji Rao in fact accepted for Maharashtra the mission of establishing 'Hindu India'. This attempt however, failed because there was no Hindu nation or Hindu national feeling on the strength of which a Hindu India could be securely founded.

What then led to the fall of Maratha power? No doubt, the causes were many. The military disasters suffered by the Maratha people from Panipat onwards, were disease of the Maratha body politic. They were not in themselves the causes of the decline of the Marathas. Military disasters, however terrible, are seldom sufficient to bring about the fall of a great people. The Romans quickly overcame the frightful defeats inflicted on them by Hannibal. A living nation quickly repairs the ravages of a war. The reasons, therefore, for the fall of the Marathas must be sought elsewhere than in the colossal defeat of Panipat. They group round one central cardinal fact. The Marathas as a people and as a power did not continue in the path of a national entity, which the national movement clearly envisaged, and which the genius of Shivaji clearly intended for it. The further away they drifted the nearer they came to a military disaster. No doubt, chronologically the third battle of Panipat lost by the Marathas was a turning-point in their history, but it was not an unaccountable stroke of destiny, as some would have us believe. It was an inevitable

consequence of certain tendencies which were becoming increasingly manifest in Maratha life. With a better general Panipat might have been postponed but it could not have been avoided. Certain changes in Maratha political life had already taken place before Panipat, which would sooner or later have brought their power to an end. Panipat hastened the end but did not cause it. Therefore, there are certain difficulties in accepting the chances of the Marathas acquiring imperial power in India. It is true that the paramountcy of the Company was established only after the three Maratha wars; but when the English crossed swords with the Marathas they were already a declining power. Even if the English had not arrived on the scene it is doubtful if the Marathas would have won the Empire of India. Maratha power first as a nation and then as an Empire was eminently suited to overthrow the Moghul Empire for which purpose it was well-organised. The Marathas created a void in the political life of India after the fall of sovereign power, but they themselves could not fill the vacant throne. The causes of the decline of the Marathas, as an imperial people were as follows :

(a) The Maratha Empire was the consequence of the surplus energy poured out by Maratha national regeneration. In this attempt to Empire the Marathas created a *feudal confederacy*. As

long as the central power was strong, the confederacy held firm, but when the Poona government weakened after the disaster of Panipat, the feudal units fell apart and even weakened each other by internal conflict. "The seeds however of domestic dissension are thickly and deeply sown in the Maratha system (if system it may be called) and it is perhaps as good a security as any that their neighbours can have that the whole of its parts composed as it now is, cannot be brought into cordial coalition."¹ Sindhia, Holkar, Bhosle and Gaikawad created semi-independent states of their own. The dissensions in the Maratha Empire the British tried to increase. "Through the whole of my correspondence you will have perceived that my grand object is at once to keep if possible the distinction of interest between this Court and its great members to which there is an undeviating tendency in the organisation of the Empire....."² Besides, the Marathas true to Hindu tradition made every office hereditary and this was a source of great weakness because nature gives no guarantee that a wise and able man will not beget a fool. Internal disputes and jealousy were chronic in Maratha power but none

¹ *Poona Residency Correspondence*, Malet's Embassy, p. 282, Vol. II.

² *Poona Residency Correspondence*, Malet's Embassy, p. 232, Vol. II.

assumed such serious proportions or did so signal a harm as the attempts of Raghoba to win the Peshwaship or the irreconcilable hostility between Holkar and Sindhia.

(b) *A changed military organisation*—The imperial army of the Marathas since the days of Balaji Bajirao started significantly to change. The experience of Balaji in his encounters against M. Bussy's trained battalions and artillery, had given him an exaggerated notion of the inferiority of the Maratha light cavalry. He did not notice the limitations of the European mode of warfare, which entirely depended on communications. To the Maratha army with Baji Rao's training communications in the European sense were irrelevant. The mode of mobile war in which the Marathas excelled, was being dropped, and the artillery arm recently introduced under Muzafar Khan and Ibrahim Khan was accorded increasing importance in the decisions regarding strategic movements and tactical manoeuvres. The experience of Panipat did not change the organisation of the Maratha armies. They continued on an increasing scale to recruit infantry and amass artillery. The empire had been built from the days of Ballaji Vishwanath on the strength of Maratha light horse, and it was a grave mistake, purely from the military point of view for the Marathas, to reorganise their army on semi-European methods. The use of artillery

condemned the Maratha people to fight pitched battles, in which the Afghans and the north Indians were more at home and in a land, which was far from the cradle of their race and, whose population was increasingly unsympathetic and hostile. It destroyed the mobility of Maratha forces, on which their effectiveness so largely depended. It meant also, that war could be decided in a few pitched battles and that the Marathas could no longer decide the issue by wearing out the enemy. The issue, henceforth, depended upon the superiority of equipment, discipline and steadiness.

(c) *A change in the composition and personnel of their armies*—One of the most important causes of the fall of Maratha people and therefore, their empire, was the change which took place in the character and composition of their armies. This was the natural result of the submergence of the national movement. The army is a historic symbol of the moral, social and economic vitality of the people. It has already been observed that the basic cause of their rise to power was a movement of the entire people of Maharashtra and particularly that of her peasantry and the fact that theirs was a national army unknown in India before. A people's movement can release enormous forces which if they are properly directed can become a great, vital and irresistible force. The exploits of the French revolution in Europe were possible,

because the national zeal of the citizen army was capable of superior effort, compared to the professional armies of European monarchs. But in the Maratha Empire since the days particularly of the Third Peshwa, the Maratha army began to acquire not only a professional but what was more serious a non-national character. They became heterogeneous, incoherent, amorphous masses as the Moghul army in its later days had been. It was as was to be expected, since the Maratha Empire was not the child of the national labour of the Maratha people, but a by-product of that national movement. Thus the proportion of the Maharashtra-born Marathas began rapidly to decrease. Most of the Maratha infantry on whom increasing reliance was being placed as the 18th century advanced, consisted of Arabs, north-Indians, Rajputs and 'half-caste Portuguese,' all of whom though naturally brave were merely mercenary adventurers. Mahadji Sindia forced by his own circumstances and though not the leader of this movement was its chief victim and denationalised the Maratha armies to a greater extent than any other Maratha prince. "He continued through life to retain many Marathas in his service; but as he was, during the greater part of it, engaged in wars to the North of the Nurbadda, these were soon outnumbered by Rajputs and Mohammedans. This was, though unmarked at the moment, a serious departure

from the first principle of the Maratha confederacy; and the habits of that nation were thus given to a population acting from a different impulse, and with few congenial feelings.”¹ Besides, a cavalry force alone such as Baji Rao possessed was not suitable for an occupation and consolidation of the conquered country, which Mahadji aimed at. “His shrewd intellect no doubt led him to perceive, that cavalry was a force more suited to predatory warfare than for the maintenance of a fixed and permanent empire. It is said too that his illegitimate birth had tended somewhat to diminish his influence amongst his countrymen, and he resolved to compensate for this disadvantage by creating a force which should be more under his own command and more available for all services than his Maratha troops. It was no doubt in pursuance of this system that he enlisted a larger proportion of Rajputs and Mohamedans and entertained large bodies of Gosseins.”² Thus the imperial adventure destroyed the nation and an attempt at consolidating the Empire denationalised the army, which was the instrument by which the Empire was created.

(d) The total absence of first-rate personalities

¹ J. Malcolm : *Memoir of Central India and Malwa*, Vol. I, p. 126.

² Fraser : *Military Memoir of Lieut. Col. J. Skinner*, Vol. I, pp. 57-58.

was quite an important cause of the fall of the Marathas, when they clashed with the English. The men who dominated the situation on the Maratha side, both in the Second as well as the Third Maratha War, were none of them men, either of first-rate character or ability. Dowlatrao Sindia, on whom Maratha power seems to have depended so much, both for its prestige and its effectiveness in offensive and defensive campaigns, was indolent and a lover of luxury even at the expense of public business. "This light-hearted prince is by no means insensible to the embarrassment of his affairs. But these things affect him for an hour. A tiger, or a pretty face, an elephant fight or a new supply of paper-kites have each sufficient attraction to divert his chagrin. . . ."¹ Besides, Dowlatrao Sindia was hardly a Maratha by culture and moral ties. The Sindia family since the days of Mahadji was increasingly estranged from Maratha life, but Dowlatrao Sindia was even more so. "Born and educated at a distance from the Deccan, surrounded by Europeans, Mohameddans, and Rajputs, and despising when contrasted with his disciplined bands, the irregular and predatory hordes, whose activity and enterprise, had established the fame of his ancestors, Dowlatrao was, and considered him-

¹ Broughton : *Letters from a Maratha Camp*, p. 123.

self, more the principal sovereign of India, than a member of the Maratha Confederacy.”¹ Yeshwant Rao Holkar, probably the ablest and the most enterprising of the Maratha leaders of his time, had an unbalanced mind, which bordered on insanity. Baji Rao II had perhaps a criminal strain in his character. Leaders are an important indication of the vital forces alive and active among a people. Therefore, it is a reflection on the Marathas themselves that they had no able leaders, when the 19th century was ushered in. It proves that their vitality was sapped. When Aurangzeb attacked them they stood like a ‘house built on a rock’ and produced great leaders, but when the English attacked them, they fell like a ‘house built on sand’.

(e) *The supply of man-power*—However even more than personalities, the supply of the vital forces of dynamic man-power are in the end decisive in any prolonged struggle. Opportunity and struggle bring out suitable leaders. But the task of establishing a Hindu Raj in India, purely on their own strength, in opposition to the Mussulmans and with the hostility of the Rajputs was beyond the strength of Maharashtra, which being a barren country lacked the adequate

¹ J. Malcolm : *Memoir of Central India and Malwa*, p. 133, Vol. I.

reserves of men and material resources, for so gigantic a task. It was beyond the strength of the Maratha people, even in the best days of their military achievement. It was true that the battle of Panipat destroyed the flower of the Maratha army. One full generation of young men of all the leading families were killed. Tradition says that there was not a single home in the whole of the Deccan, *which had not lost a member*. But it was not Panipat alone, which sapped the vital roots of Maratha power in men. The process was of some duration and had begun from the close of the 17th century. Up to Panipat, the Marathas were constantly engaged in war and, therefore, for well-nigh a century there was constant drain on their resources of man-power. Moreover, this strain was on a population which was quite small in total number. The Total Maratha population understood in the widest sense could not have exceeded five millions at the time, and naturally that part of the population from which men enlisted for active service was even smaller. Clearly on the basis of a population so small, the drain of a century could be almost fatal. This explains the failure of the Maratha to acquire the empire of India and suggests that even if all other mistakes had been avoided, it would have been impossible for them to have conquered and permanently occupied all India. They attempted

a task beyond their strength. It would have been like expecting Czecho-slovakia to conquer Europe.

(f) *Jealousy between the Marathas and the Brahmins*—The fall of the Maratha Empire was due to the weakness introduced into the empire, by the deep and unbridgeable cleavage of interests between the Maratha and the Brahmin sections. The judgment of so great an authority as Sarkar ought not to be lightly put aside. He admits that the disintegration of Shivaji's kingdom after his death and the rapid decline of Peshwa power later was due to a growth of "orthodoxy" and more rigid observance of caste rules.¹ This tendency was particularly noticeable since the days of the Peshwas. In all civil departments of government, the Peshwa continued to employ the "caste of Brahmins,"² and as the century advanced "the Maratha administration" became Brahmanical and the principal officers of government whether civil or military were "either in the possession of Brahmins or so disposed as to be under their control."³ This monopolisation of power exclusively by the Brahmins was productive

¹ Sarkar : *Shivaji*, p. 388.

² Forrest : *Selections from State papers*. (Maratha Series), Vol. I, p. 250.

³ *Poona Residency Correspondence*, Vol. II. (Malet's Embassy), p. 342.

of great evil. It made a deep loyalty to the Peshwa, the virtual head of the state, problematical and not instinctive and the Maratha class instead of sharing power became merely an instrument in the hands of the Brahmins for the maintenance of that power. If leadership had remained in the hand of the Marathas, on account of their instinctive parochialism and local patriotism characteristic of the peasantry, the Maratha nation might have retained its national characteristics. This Maratha-Brahmin jealousy was taken cognisance of, by the British diplomats some of whom held "it as a political maxim that all powers in India," were "interested in the continuance of the Brahmin government; the jealousy which from various causes ever subsists between the Maratha chiefs and the Brahmins," would "prevent that union of the whole empire, which must be most formidable to the rest of India."¹ The Brahmins invariably possessed civil power in all Hindu states because of their unrivalled possession of the pen, but in a military state such as that of the Marathas, civil power must be forever subordinate to the military power. A military state by historical experience languishes if its chief direction devolves upon the civil administration. As soon

¹ Forrest : *Selections from State papers* : (Maratha Series), Vol. I, p. 267.

as the civil power assumed control of the Maratha state it languished. This effect was not immediately apparent, because the Peshwas by happy accident combined for a time in their own person civil power as well as a gifted military leadership. Nana Phadnis however represented a complete control of the military state by civil power. Under Nana's administration, in spite of his great qualities, the Maratha empire continued its inevitable fall. The leader of the Maratha Empire by its very nature had to be a military man. The Marathas might have saved themselves for a longer time, under Mahadji Sindia. Since the Brahmins had acquired power at Poona, the Maratha chieftains who formed the leadership of the bulk of the effective military strength of the Empire, desired independence. "The feudal nature of the tenures of the great Maratha or military chieftains invariably leads them to a desire for an affection of independence of the Brahmin or civil power; while on the other hand, it is the constant and most important object of the Brahmin branch, notwithstanding temporary and personal obligations, to check, control and use to its own aggrandisement the power of the Maratha chieftains."¹

¹ *Poona Residency Correspondence*, Vol. II, (Malet's Embassy), p. 132.

It is necessary here to digress a little in order to evaluate the position of Mahadji Sindia and Nana Fadnis, in the history of the fall of the Maratha Empire and of the rise of the British. Great tribute has been paid to both of them by contemporaries and subsequent historians. Sindia was considered to be the ablest man of his times, while the following tribute of Malet to Nana, when he was the unrivalled leader of the Maratha state, was by no means an exaggeration. "We have still further prospect of security to ourselves in the consideration that the present flourishing and formidable state of the Maratha Empire is principally ascribable to the personal abilities and influence of Nana and that his death will probably make very material alteration in the state."¹ The reputation of Sindia rests on the powerful state that he built up in north India, his possession of Delhi and the nominal power of the Moghul Empire, the disciplined battalions that he trained under French officers and the bid he made for the leadership of the Maratha state. The reputation of Nana Fadnis is based on the unrivalled possession that he obtained of the Poona government for well-nigh twenty years and his success in maintaining its independence, in the face of

¹ *Poona Residency Correspondence*, Vol. II. (Malet's Embassy), p. 377.

British danger. Some historians would even go so far as to say, that Nana ceaselessly endeavoured to unify the Maratha Empire under his own control and but for the untimely death of Madhavrao II and the rise of the British power, he had brought the empire, in 1795 to the point of competing again for the entire empire of India. "The facility, with which the Poona government makes subservient to its views all the great members of the Maratha Empire, frequently even contrary to their own individual interests, renders it an unquestionable point that the Poona government at present possesses very considerable control over all the members of the Maratha empire. I am inclined to think that the great good fortune or success of the Maratha Empire of late years, has in some degree estranged Nana from the wary and moderate system that he pursued....."¹

However, without minimising their great qualities and achievements one may say that too much is claimed for both Nana and Mahadji. The various causes already mentioned which brought about the decay of the Marathas, neither of these men did anything to arrest. In spite of their leadership, the cancer which was eating the vital

¹ *Poona Residency Correspondence*, Vol. II. (Malet's Embassy), p. 377.

roots of Maratha power throughout the 18th century continued. Mahadji did not differ from other military adventurers as far as his own achievements were considered. Haidar Ali, therefore, was at least his equal and Ranjit Singh probably his superior, in sheer ability, power of organisation and the solidity of his work. It is possible that if Mahadji were to be the leader of the Poona government, his military capacities might have helped the Maratha Empire to survive a little longer or at least it would have given a better account of itself, in the operations against the British. But just as Baji Rao symbolised the denationalisation of the Maratha state, Mahadji symbolised the denationalisation of the Maratha army. Mahadji was able but not truly great.

Nana too was a man of extraordinary ability but in true greatness he can not be ranked either with Shivaji or Baji Rao. His important mistakes of policy, were as follows: (a) His alliance with the British against Tipoo in the Third Mysore War cannot be defended from the point of view purely of Maratha interests. No doubt Tipoo was a great danger to the Marathas, but he was their only security against the British in the Peninsula. Both Sindia and Holkar appear to have warned Nana against alliance with the British, but he took no notice. By reducing Tipoo's power, the Marathas helped

the British to acquire a virtual supremacy in southern India. In fact Nana sacrificed high national policy for a pique against Tipoo and a few districts. (b) Nana made proposal to the British, through Malet, in order to extend the "Brahmin empire" all over India, through British help. It appears that the Poona government seriously entertained an idea of sending an embassy to England for purposes of "procuring the junction of the Company and the aid of its troops in the general plan for the settlement of all India and of reducing it to the power of the Marathas in the person of the Peshwa."¹ Besides, "Tipoo's power was to be subverted and the northern boundary of the empire was to be regulated by its extent under Aurangzeb."² Malet says further, "I thought likewise, that I could perceive that another part of the plan of this Court in the pursuit of our assistance is founded in another great systematic object, that of reducing the great Maratha and other feudatories of the empire from their present state of almost optional obedience, to a more rigid subordination to the executive power of the Peshwa and the Brahmins...."³ This was a piece of statesmanship almost impossible to comprehend. Was Nana so ignorant or was

¹ *Poona Residency Correspondence*, Vol. II, p. 167.

² *Poona Residency Correspondence*, Vol. II, p. 169.

³ *Poona Residency Correspondence*, Vol. II, p. 168.

the narrowness of the ruling clique so great, that they did not know the platitude of history that a people can acquire and retain power by building it out of themselves and by their own moral and physical effort and not by external help? (c) During all his ascendancy Nana made no serious effort to rehabilitate the military efficiency of the Poona government. The military achievements of Poona, while Nana was at the helm of affairs was throughout nothing. The successes of the First Maratha War were won by the troops and strategy of Sindia, while the Poona armies failed consistently, both against Haidar Ali and Tipoo. The War with Tipoo particularly showed Tipoo's power and Peshwa's impotence. The army which returned from the war with Tipoo showed that the military power of Poona was at its lowest ebb. "That part of the army which is now encamped in the neighbourhood of Poona (both horses and men) seems in a miserable condition and the complaints of the hardships they have sustained from pestilence, scarcity of provisions and want of pay are loud and general. From these circumstances and the accounts of the dissensions among the chiefs which were near ending in open rupture and which were with difficulty prevented by the most earnest entreaties and supplications of Haripant, lead me to conclude that this durbar has been very fortunate

in procuring a peace on the present terms.”¹ As for the battle of Kharda it was won by Sindia's battalions.

Finally, the last cause of the fall of the Maratha people, is embodied in another aspect of their failure to establish an empire in India. It has already been said that the unique and distinctive feature of the rise of the Maratha people was their national movement, which however soon disappeared. So far history gives abundant testimony to the observation that a stable and enduring civilisation is established only when new ideals with a vision broader than before, greater inspirations and a more progressive outlook on life are embodied in the movement of a people. A people in order to establish a new civilisation must preach a new order. Their social, political, economic and spiritual life must have as its ideal and basis something new and progressive; something which they can give to others. The new order gives a moral and organisational superiority to a people and they prevail in a struggle against others, who have no philosophy and no ideals. Those who bring the new message may go down after an initial flush of triumph, but the progressive ideas which they bring remain and take root. The French revolution, for example, was based on certain ideas of human relationships, of government and of life in its social and economic

¹ *Poona Residency Correspondence*, Vol. II, p. 133.

aspects, that were a great improvement over those of a feudal and serf-ridden Europe. Hence the extraordinary achievements of revolutionary France, which took so great a part in the birth and establishment of 19th century liberalism in Europe. The Marathas in India could not create an empire or a civilisation because their movement for an empire was not based on any progressive idealism in any sphere whatsoever.

The foregoing analysis makes it clear that Maratha power was successful in overthrowing the Moghul Empire, for which purpose it was well-organised and eminently suited, but beyond this negative achievement it could achieve nothing by way of creating a constructive fabric of civilisation, either for India as a whole or in Maharashtra, in spite of the early promise of its national movement. Their religio-national movement, soon lost its creative genius as soon as the national movement was submerged under the religious sentiment. The Maratha Empire was like a flood, which spread far and wide while it lasted, but unlike the well-directed course of a mature river, it left no permanent work of any value behind it. The Marathas therefore, created a political void in India, after the fall of the sovereign Moghul power. They themselves could not fill the vacant place thus created. They themselves had no new ideal or constructive suggestion to make regarding the

political and social organisation of the country as a whole, when they undertook the imperial adventure. The Peshwa period shows a continuous lack of political wisdom. One empire was destroyed, but nothing constructive materialised to take its place. The greatest defect of the religio-nationalist movements among which that of the Marathas was one, is that they are not only not progressive, but often leave the last state worse than the first. The 18th century witnessed a century-long civil war in India, with greater destruction of life and property than was known for many a century before. There was indescribable misery among the poorer order of the community. "When grain is dear, hundreds of poor families are driven to the most distressing shifts to obtain a bare subsistence. At times I have often seen women and children employed in picking out the undigested grains of corn, from the dung of different animals about the camp."¹ The Maratha population was uprooted from its home and lived for pay and plunder, the most demoralising occupation that a nation can indulge in. They lost so much of that positive virtue which had made them a great people in the latter half of the 17th century, that the following description by Elphinstone, though negative and exaggerated, contained an impor-

¹ Broughton : *Letters from a Maratha Camp*, pp. 33-34.

tant element of truth at the time he viewed the Maratha people. "Taking the whole as a nation, they will be found to be inferior to their Mohammedan neighbours in knowledge and civilisation, in spirit, in generosity and perhaps in courage, but less tainted with pride, insolence, tyranny, effminacy, debauchery; less violent, less bigoted, and... more peaceful, mild and humane."¹

¹ Elphinstone : *Territories conquered from the Peshwa*, p. 7.

CHAPTER IV

THE BRITISH CONQUEST—I

We have already considered the rise and fall of the Maratha people. It shows that the Moghals and the Marathas for their own reasons, failed to bring the entire country under their own control and in attempting it irreparably weakened each other. The British, therefore, when they bid for supremacy acquired it almost unchallenged. The opposition that was made to them in their conquest was so poor as to be hardly serious. That a country so vast, rich, populous and full of people with great military traditions, should fall so easily requires an explanation. However, in order fully to appreciate the British conquest, it is necessary to remind oneself of certain basic historical facts, regarding the land of India. They are as follows:

Firstly, the people of the land in India have never taken much interest in the political fortune of their country or in the rise and fall of their governments. The people, demoralised by oppression, uninstructed in everything which makes life worth living, without a *leadership of a strong middle class* and isolated in self-contained villages,

were mere hewers of wood and drawers of water, for their everchanging masters. Owing to this, governments could be changed by military action and territories conquered with an ease unbelievable in modern times. Even in Europe, however, people's consciousness of themselves as an entity, is a comparatively modern phenomenon. In India of the 18th century the people did not exist as a political body, a fact which weakened a weak government in its resistance against aggression, and which proportionately eased the task of the conqueror. India was a mere geographical expression, and the wars and battles which were so common in Indian history were not battles of peoples but faction-fights. "A victory is commonly decided by the fall of the principal in the army. These begin the onset and are followed by the hardiest of their partisans, who no sooner see their chief destroyed than they take to flight. Numbers of such skirmishes compose what is called a battle in Hindostan. The greatest slaughter falls around the commander-in-chief, as the victory is confirmed in the instant of his death."¹

Secondly, India in her history does not show any progress towards nationhood. This is not surprising since lands of the vastness and populousness of India have become nations in very

¹ Orme : *Historical fragments*, p. 419.

modern times. Besides, India with her multitude of races, cultures, languages, sects and above all her caste-system, could not and cannot easily become a nation. The lack of consciousness as a people and therefore, also the absence of nationhood was responsible for that peculiar feature of Indian history, namely the vast crop of treachery and treason. No other history could be fuller of it. "Disaffection and treason are crimes of such luxuriant growth in these countries, that such a charge excites neither abhorrence nor even astonishment....."¹

Thirdly, India did not divide herself into separate independent nationalities as Europe gradually evolved. The regional language areas could have become a basis for the formation of independent nationalities, but two factors essential for the formation of such states were lacking. (a) These regions in India were never under one united rule of their own for a sufficiently long time, to create an administrative and cultural unity and oneness of interests which seems to be necessary for the formation of stable nationalities. Nor did these regions possess a class which was sufficiently vitally interested in the formation of independent political states in these regions, to lead the movement. (b) These regions do not possess well-demarcated boundaries as France, England or Spain does,

¹ Broughton : *Letters from a Maratha Camp*, p. 134.

which were easily defensible and behind which the people could grow into united nationhood without a violent disturbance of the process from outside. Countries like Germany and Poland which do not enjoy the advantage of well-defined strategic boundaries were slower in the growth of their nationhood than the western European countries. India as a whole does possess such geographical boundaries but internal weakness has retarded any all-India national growth.

Fourthly, All Indian states were military states that lived by the sword and perished by the sword and their ruling groups considered it their duty to extend their boundaries and thus produced in the land a state of perpetual discord and civil war. Besides, the actions of these rulers were unrestrained as there existed in India no organisation either moral, political or spiritual, which bound the entire people of India and which therefore had a special sanction on that account. In fact, there was no authority of a super-state character permanently established in India. Europe had such an organisation in the middle ages, in the Catholic Church, whose spiritual power and prestige wielded through its central organisation, an enormous political influence. Though the authority of the Church was not binding, the fact that it possessed great spiritual prestige, coupled with the position that it attracted in its service the best

intellect and some of the best blood in Europe, invested it with a very strong restraining power in the counsels of Europe.

It is necessary to appreciate these facts in order to understand the pathetic self-surrender of India, to foreign aggression to which she repeatedly succumbed in her history. The British in their conquest of India did not encounter the united resistance of the Indian rulers nor did they meet with a resistance of the people. "The want of union among the natives appears one of the strongest foundations of our power. Further we are supported by the good opinion of the lower and middle classes to whom our government is indulgent."¹

There is no doubt that British paramountcy was an accomplished fact when Wellesley left the country. But British successes during his administration were not spectacular military achievements like the adventures of Alexander or Napoleon. They were more solid and enduring. They were made possible because British power in India evolved through the latter half of the 18th century, into the strongest military power, until by the end of the century the British possessed almost the monopoly of military power in India. Because

¹ J. Malcolm: *History of India*, Vol. II, Appendix viii, p. cclxiv.

of the basic facts of Indian history already given India was peculiarly susceptible to military conquest. Till the coming of Wellesley as Governor-General, the British had followed a cautious policy of developing their own resources and of sporadic but safe acquisition of territory. They had insulated their possessions from such restless neighbours as the Marathas and Tipoo Sultan by the interposition of such protected governments as that of the Karnatak and Oudh. It is remarkable that during the early stages of the foundation of their power from 1757 to 1792 the British were able to consolidate their power and position in the three presidencies without serious opposition. This they were enabled to do on account of three factors:

(a) The gradual weakness of French influence and interests in India, due to the policy of the government of France and the decadence of the French ruling classes generally.

(b) After the middle of the 18th century the Maratha power began visibly to weaken and the British did not have to contend either for Bengal or for the Karnatak against a formidable Indian power.

(c) The governments of Bengal and Karnatak were particularly weak and this made British military preponderance in these areas complete even at a very early stage of their own power in India. Clive no doubt employed machiavellian cunning,

wholesale disaffection of the Nawab's army opposed to him and support from the mercantile classes for acquitting Bengal, but the fact that three provinces were held and British resources and military power consolidated and augmented, shows that British success was due not merely to superior cunning but had military force behind it. The armies which Clive and his lieutenants encountered could be called armies by indulgence, as their military value was next to nothing. "The rudeness of the military art in Indostan can scarcely be imagined, but by those who have seen it. The infantry consists of a multitude of people assembled together without rank and file; some with swords and targets, who can never stand the shock of a body of horse; some bearing matchlocks which with the best of order can produce but uncertain fire; some armed with lances too long or too weak to be of service, even if ranged with utmost regularity and discipline."¹ Thus in the absence of discipline and equipment Indian armies were nothing better than a rabble. But besides, these armies were even more useless for military purposes because "more encumbered with the conveniences of life than with the preparations for war" they formed, "loose, straggling disorderly camps and "made irregular

¹ Orme : *Historical fragments*, p. 417.

dilatory marches.”¹

Thus while Clive acquired the territorial foundations for a future growth of British power on the Indian mainland, which following the vision of Dupleix he seems to have conceived, Warren Hastings consolidated these gains by attempting to stabilise and develop the resources of these lands, and succeeded in establishing in Company's territories, a tolerable form of civil government, which had weakened all over India, through the political upheavals of the 18th century. This was made all the easier because “to men tired out as they were with wars and contentions and among whom from the repeated conquests to which they were subjected, were lost to all feelings of national pride, the very permanency of usurpation was a blessing.”² During the administration of Warren Hastings, British possessions were in a certain amount of danger, through the Maratha-Haidar combination against them during the First Maratha War. Though able to defend itself, British power was still in too undeveloped a condition, to force a decisive military defeat on either the Marathas or Haidar. Besides in this war the British were handicapped on account of the absence of a single unified authority over the three

¹ Orme : *Historical fragments*, p. 419.

² J. Malcolm : *History of India*, Vol. I, p. 6.

presidencies. Bombay and Madras still showed and exercised considerable independence, both in policy and execution. The result was a friction between the three presidencies ruinous to a vigorous prosecution of the war. Further, the pre-occupation of Britain in the American War of Independence, robbed Hastings of all military reinforcements from home. The British authorities in Bombay who were chiefly responsible for the war against the Marathas, appear to have embarked on it, without sufficient appreciation of the undeveloped state of their own power and without either adequate resources or preparation. As a matter of fact the British do not seem to have expected to fight at all for reinstating Raghoba on the Peshwaship. "From the open division among the Brahmans and the Marathas and from positive engagements with the party in opposition to Nana Phadnis, we were given most confidently to expect immediate and effectual aid, if we once openly and declaredly entered on measures for the subversion of his government. A general reputed indisposition to that government among the Maratha officers and people, also affords good grounds of expectation for effectual aid. The words of our instructions warrant these suppositions, from all of which it was concluded that the march to Poona would be all ended with little difficulty or opposition; that little time would be employed in mili-

tary operations.”¹ Militarily the First Maratha War did not go in favour of the British and as the hostilities were prolonged their chances of success diminished. It was by adroit diplomacy that Warren Hastings brought the British power unscathed out of this war. The war had lasted too long for the British to carry on. “Our resources anticipated by the current demand of our military establishments to which they are unequal and burdened with a heavy debt can not long support the present regime”² It was Mahadji’s anxiety to make a separate peace for himself and his personal policy to befriend the English inspired by an ambition to increase his own power, that the British obtained an opportunity to conclude a satisfactory peace with the Marathas. As for the war in the Karnatak, Sir Eyre Coote despaired of success against Haidar, as long as the latter made communications and supplies of the British army very precarious but at the same time refused battle and thus prolonged a ruinous war. Coote was in such difficulties that he went even so far as to ask Goddard to patch up almost any peace with the Marathas, in order to extricate him by creating a diversion against Haidar on the Malabar coast. In the eventual peace

¹ Forrest : *Selections from State Papers* (Maratha Series), Vol. I, p. 359.

² Forrest : *Selections from State Papers*, (Maratha Series), Vol. I, p. 446.

with Haidar, British diplomacy earned a great success, because Haidar was compelled to give up all his conquests in the Karnatak under the potential threat of a Maratha-English coalition against him. The treaty between the Marathas and the English stipulated as follows: "The Peshwa engages, that whereas, the Nawab Haidar Ali Khan having concluded a treaty with him has disturbed and taken possession of territories belonging to the English and their allies, he shall be made to relinquish them."¹

The power of Haidar Ali Khan, whose genius and military talent had raised the Mysore state to the point where not only was it the dominant power in the Peninsula but threatened the British power with mortal danger, was a source of great anxiety to the British. They feared Haidar and it was their consistent policy to weaken him by an alliance with the Marathas. Hastings wrote, "It must be a principal object of your attention to prevail upon the Maratha government to invade the territories of Haidar Ali Khan."² Sir Eyre Coote wrote of the real necessity there was for seeking an accommodation with the Marathas on any terms, rather than by prolonging a destructive war, delay

¹ Forrest : *Selections from State Papers*, (Maratha Series), Vol. I, p. 480.

² Forrest : *Selections from State Papers* (Maratha Series), Vol. I, p. 474.

should have happened in pursuing such measures as promised the accomplishment of "the grand national object—giving an effectual check to the increasing power and influence of Haidar Ali Khan."¹ This chance the British did not get while Haidar was alive, but during the administration of Lord Cornwallis, the British succeeded by adroit diplomacy in forming an alliance with the Nizam and the Marathas, against Haidar's son Tipoo Sultan. The combined effect of the developed resources of Bengal, British military efficiency and the Triple Alliance was the destruction of Tipoo's dominant position in the Deccan, and the establishment of British power-domination in the Peninsula. Cornwallis thus made British power, though not politically, militarily supreme in Southern India.

It is interesting to note, that these developments in the Indian political situation took place in spite of the Act of Legislature, which forbade territorial conquests in India, by the Company. The Board of Directors also recommended a policy of neutrality (1786). "But one universal principle never to be departed from, either in the present condition of the native powers or in any future revolution amongst them, is that we are completely satisfied with the possessions we already have and will engage in no war, for the purpose of further

¹Forrest : *Selections from State Papers*, (Maratha Series), Vol. I, p. 445.

acquisition.”¹ However it was Sir John Shore who followed this policy of neutrality most consistently. His reasons for it were partly the financial difficulties of the Company in India, and partly a faulty judgment on military questions. He imagined that since the adoption of a europeanised infantry by the Indian powers, trained under French officers, the British did not possess that superiority over Indian armies, which their superior equipment and discipline had formerly given them. He wrote: “At a period not very remote from the present, a small number of troops commanded by English officers ventured to oppose with success, the numerous armies of the native powers and the inequality of numbers was of little avail against the united efforts of valour and discipline. The natives have now imitated our arts and we dare no longer trust a body of men in the field that formerly would have penetrated through the opposition of all India, and though it may be presumed that the potentates of Hindustan from defects inherent in the constitution of their governments and from mistrust of Europeans will never be able to introduce that discipline in their armies, which we have established in ours.....they may attain a point of perfection fatal to the permanency of our possessions in the East. The con-

¹ *Poona Residency Correspondence*, (Malet's Embassy), p. 27.

clusion, therefore, to be drawn from this reasoning is that war should be avoided, as the bane of our interests, a conclusion deducible also upon other grounds and sanctioned by the legislature of Great Britain.”¹ Sir John Shore consistently followed this policy when he became Governor General. His policy has been severely criticised by all historians and was condemned by most of his contemporaries because British neutrality ensured a total defeat of the Nizam in 1795, increased the influence of the French party at his Durbar and made the Marathas more powerful. Thus Malcolm wrote: “It was proved from the events of this administration that no ground of political advantage could be abandoned without being instantly occupied by an enemy; and that to resign influence was not merely to resign power but to allow that power to pass into hands hostile to the British government. The consequence of political inaction was equally obvious..... This inactive system of policy so far from attaining its object, which was to preserve affairs upon the footing in which it has found them, has only the effect of making the British government stationary, while all around it advanced and of exposing it to dangers arising from revolutions of its neighbours,

¹ *Poona Residency Correspondence*, (Malet's Embassy), p. 346.

while it was even denied the power of adapting its policy to the change of circumstances.”¹ All these critics of Shore condemned his policy largely on the ground that it resulted in an increased advantage to the Maratha power, which was considered to be the chief opponent and constant menace of the British. But this criticism is misplaced, because the Maratha power was in a progressive state of gradual decay for well-nigh half-a-century before Shore adopted his policy of neutrality. No temporary success even of the magnitude of Khorda, was likely to revitalise it, except to prolong its agony. The falsity of Shore’s position lay in the fact that a policy of neutrality in Indian politics was unreal, because owing to the inexorable facts of geography and to the military nature of Indian governments, the strongest military power had to expand until it either subdued the entire country or was broken in the attempt. It was this which compelled the Moghul empire to expand in spite of its unwieldiness and to go under in an attempt to subdue the whole of India. Aurangzeb cannot be blamed for his policy of conquest of the entire Deccan, which was inherent in the system of Indian *geo-politics*. Shore must be blamed not because his policy allowed the British enemies to grow stronger at the expense of their allies, but because by his

¹ J. Malcolm : *History of India*, Vol. I, p. 192.

static ideal British power denied to itself, the destiny of paramount power, which was inexorably its own. States in India that lose their dynamism, soon sicken and die.

CHAPTER V

THE BRITISH CONQUEST—II

When Marquess of Wellesley arrived in India, the stage was prepared for sweeping British conquests, because while the Company had developed its resources, improved its military establishment and gained valuable allies, the power of Mysore was rendered innocuous by Cornwallis and Maratha Empire was rapidly approaching internal disorder and consequent dissolution. However, it is incorrect to suppose that Wellesley initiated any fundamentally new departure in British policy in India. In fact, his measures were the logical development of the policy, which British statesmen had been continuously following ever since they obtained a territorial footing on the mainland of India. Wellesleyan policy in India could have been postponed but it could not have been avoided either by British statesmen or by Indian Potentates without doing violence to the basic historical development in India, during the 18th century. It is possible that had Cornwallis not resigned in 1797, "we can well imagine that no great upheaval

would have taken place.”¹ But it would nevertheless have come sooner or later.

Besides, as will later be seen, the task of Wellesley was by no means a formidable one. The ease with which India was conquered by the British shows that India's institutions lacked vigour and adaptability. A study of the British conquest of India ought to be undertaken, with a view to discovering those drawbacks in India's political life, which made the conquest so easy and almost inevitable. British conquest has already been studied from various points of view and emphasis has been laid, on the political, social and economic causes of the conquest. Those who stress the political causes point out that the want of union among the Indian powers was one of the strongest foundations of British power. Those who emphasise the social causes explain that the British were supported by the good opinion of the lower and middle classes to whom their government was indulgent. As for the economic causes the commercial classes in India no doubt encouraged British conquest, particularly those of Bengal, as British power alone could guarantee law and order and afford security to trade and commerce. Every one of these causes certainly contributed to the British conquest of India, without any one of them being

¹ P. E. Roberts : *India under Wellesley*, p. 29.

the sole or exclusive cause of the event. However the fact that India had been repeatedly conquered by foreigners and that military states alone flourished in the country, proves that the British conquest must be fundamentally explained by military causes. These military causes were the outcome of political feeling among the people of India or rather the absence of a political feeling, because a country without political consciousness among the people can alone fall a permanent victim to foreign conquest.

British policy in India during that half-a-century from Clive to Wellesley vacillated between neutrality and aggression. The authorities in England were generally in favour of observing strict neutrality and of maintaining and developing territories already acquired, while the British statesmen in India were far more aggressive in their policy. But beyond a certain amount of restraint placed on the British in India, the policy of the authorities in England was generally circumvented. The British in India justified their aggressive policy on the following grounds.

Firstly, the danger of a French attack on India and the necessity of preparing to meet it.

It is argued that an aggressive policy on the part of the British was necessary to prepare against a naval and military invasion of India by the French. It might have taken the form of a large-scale inva-

sion in force or the despatch of a French expeditionary force to co-operate with Indian powers. Thus it was mentioned and generally believed that M. St. Lublin "was deputed by the French ministry and was to form an alliance which would restore the influence of France in this country, be the means of crushing the power of the English and give rise to many commercial and other advantages to the French nation."¹ Further, the English suspected that "Nana" sought "to fortify himself in" his government, against his competitors and against "themselves" by means of his connections with the French.² It was on this ground that Warren Hastings defended the First Maratha war, which the British fought in order to obtain "the exclusion of the French and all other European nations from the alliance and from the ports and dominions of the Marathas."³ During the administration of Cornwallis, apprehensions of a French attack on India, were not entertained largely because of the internal political situation in France. However when Wellesley became the Governor-General, the danger of a French invasion appeared imminent, on account of Napoleon's occupation of Egypt and his well-known ambition to push

¹ Forrest: *Selections from State Papers*, p. 291.

² Forrest: *Selections from State Papers*, p. 298.

³ Forrest: *Selections from State Papers*, p. 474.

on to India, to strike a blow at the British power. The year 1797, when Wellesley sailed to India was a very critical one in Britain's international position. England was then fighting the three maritime powers—France, Spain and Holland. Her last ally Austria was routed by Napoleon at Rivoli. There was mutiny in the navy and political discontent in the country. In this year, there was a terrible financial crisis and gold payments were suspended not to be resumed till 1821.¹ The Alexandrian project of Napoleon to press on to India from Egypt by a land-route appears chimerical to many modern historians, though military students have pronounced it to be quite practicable. General Stuart wrote to Rt. Hon. Henry Dundas in 1800 A.D. as follows: "Bombay is our natural emporium.....with the Red Sea, which has acquired a new degree of political importance since the attempt of the French to reach India through Egypt. Whatever may be the present success of the attempt, it becomes incumbent on us to watch henceforward this avenue to India. The design is in itself practicable and would have most likely succeeded, had the Turks either been in alliance with the French or had the enemy pushed on immediate-

¹ P. E. Roberts : *India under Wellesley*, p. 32.

ly after he had reached Cairo.”¹ Napoleon’s attempt, therefore failed largely because of the opposition of the Turks on account of his occupation of Egypt and the severance of his line of communications and supply with France, on account of the destruction of the French Fleet at the Battle of the Nile, rather than due to any inherent unsoundness of the military expedition itself. It is further argued that besides the land-route through Persia and North-Western approaches to India, there was another direction from which the invading French force could have come to India. The French ambassador in Poona during Malet’s embassy had suggested that French effort could be directed from the Corromandel to the Malabar Coast.² The French possessed a colony at Mauritius, where they could have assembled a navy and troops with transports for a surprise landing on the western coasts of friendly Indian powers. Such an operation it was argued would have succeeded because the western coast of India was too long for the British navy to patrol all the harbours effectively and to prevent a French force from reaching the shores of India. Finally, a French naval squadron might have succeeded in establishing by determined effort at least a tem-

¹ Owen : *Selections from Wellesley’s Despatches*, p. 577.

² *Poona Residency Correspondence*, (Malet’s Embassy), pp. 34-35.

porary superiority in the Indian Ocean as another French squadron had done with great effect, during the critical year of the American War of Independence. With reference to this, Arthur Wellesley wrote as follows in 1802 A.D. "We have seen the French navies contend with those of Great Britain and an opinion has frequently been advanced by those who are in the habit of considering these questions, that during this war the navy of France would have been as formidable as her army if it had not been for the continental contest, which rendered the land-service more necessary to her."¹ This is borne out by the fact that in spite of the enormous difficulties under which the French naval forces had to operate, they were able to capture British property in the Indian Ocean, worth two million pounds.²

Secondly, the menace of Tipoo Sultan.

The historians in justifying the more aggressive policy of the British particularly during the administration of Wellesley, argue that his policy of aggression was justified, because "in the consideration of every question of Indian policy or in an inquiry into the expediency of any political measure, it is absolutely necessary to view it, not only as it will affect Indian powers, but as it will

¹ Owen : *Selections from Wellington's Despatches*, p. 87.

² Owen : *Selections from Wellesley's Despatches*, p. 759.

affect the French.”¹ They argue that the French intrigued at the Courts of Indian powers, with a view to persuading them to commence hostilities against the Company and also to form alliances for co-operation with the invading French forces. It was, therefore, absolutely necessary to remove even by force all the potential and actual allies of the French. It was on this ground that the destruction of Tipoo was justified by the British. But Tipoo’s case was unique because though he was certainly the most well-known and powerful ally of the French and had it in his power to give effective help to them, the state which his father had built up was militarily the dominant power in the Deccan, until Cornwallis humbled it, and thus Tipoo was a danger to the British. Besides, Tipoo’s entire policy was so consistently anti-British that he was unlikely to leave any possible stone unturned to bring about their ruin. As early as 1787, Mr. Cambell wrote from Madras as follows: “Intelligence which has lately come to my hand mentions that the French are endeavouring to form some agreement with Tipoo, whereby they are to engage to furnish him with a large body of Europeans to occupy some of his sea-ports on the west-coast, in the event of his army being drawn to the internal

¹ Owen : *Selections from Wellesley’s Despatches*, p. 274.

parts or eastern boundaries of the country.”¹ Though Tipoo’s power was seriously diminished by the Third Mysore War, the political events in India since 1792, had considerably improved his relative position vis-a-vis the allied powers. The Triple Alliance formed against him between the British, the Marathas and the Nizam had dissolved. The Marathas very nearly destroyed the Nizam in 1795 and after the latter’s defeat the power at his Court passed into the hands of the French party led for some time by M. Reymond. After 1795 the Maratha Empire was so much distracted by civil war that Tipoo had nothing to fear from the Marathas for some time. But since 1792 the position of the Company had become worse vis-a-vis Tipoo. Company’s army in the Karnatak which could take part in field operations was only 14,000 men, a force clearly insufficient to reduce Seringapatam, since a force of 20,000 men had failed to accomplish it during the Third Mysore War. Further, Tipoo’s army contained a powerful arm of mobile cavalry, which Wellington later observed was the best he ever saw and which Tipoo intended to use for harassing the communications of the enemy. Besides, the finances of the Company were very low. Its credit was poor and its debt

¹ *Poona Residency Correspondence*: The Allied War with Tipoo Sultan, Vol. III, p. 5.

stood at £ 10,866,588¹. Further, the Company expected an invasion of the north-western provinces by Zaman Shah, the king of Afghanistan. Tipoo had been negotiating for an alliance with the French for a number of years before the British attacked him. In his letter to the people of the Isle of France dated 2nd April 1795 he offered to support a French attack on the possessions of the Company, with men, material and money. He, however, made it clear that he did not intend to initiate military operations on his own, unless French military and naval forces actually arrived in India, because he did not want to be left in the lurch. Whatever the precise motives of the French at Mauritius, the Proclamation issued by them, probably the outcome of irresponsible enthusiasm and vague idealism on 30th January 1798, together with other evidence afterwards collected, made it clear that Tipoo had formed "an offensive and defensive alliance" with the French in order "to declare war against the English whom he ardently" desired "to expel from India."

Thirdly, the danger to the Company from the Maratha Power.

It was believed that the destruction of the Maratha Empire as the major political factor in India, was necessary for the security of the Com-

¹ Owen : *Wellington's Memorandum*, p. 2.

pany's territories. The hostile contact between the Company and the Marathas during the First Maratha War showed that the latter still possessed something of their former vigour. But it was not till the end of the 18th century, that political contact was established principally through the fall of Tipoo between the Company and the Marathas. Till then the Marathas and the English had remained on terms of friendly intercourse on account of the personal policies of Mahadji and Nana. After Tipoo's fall, "the Marathas and the English were become neighbours on various points and the latter being pledged to defend their allies equally with their own subjects, it seemed next to impossible that misunderstanding could long be avoided; for it had been the great object of the Marathas to establish a permanent superiority in the Deccan."¹ The Maratha Empire it was said, constituted a danger for the following reasons:

(a) *The prospect of a united direction of Maratha Affairs*—Ever since the ruin of Tipoo's power, the Marathas had become jealous and suspicious of British policy. They, therefore, intended to combine the whole of their power against the Company. Sindia and Holkar had warned Nana against assisting the British to overpower Tipoo.

¹ Gleig : *British Empire in India*, Vol. III, p. 180.

"There can be no doubt whatever that the great object of every Maratha statesman has been to combine their force to attack the British government and if they had ever been free from disputes among themselves, they would have carried that plan into execution." (A. Wellesley).¹ Such a combination of Maratha power was on the point of realisation towards the end of the 18th century not through free co-operation among the Confederates, but owing to the concentration of Maratha power in the hands of Sindia who had brought Poona government under his own control. On this question A. Wellesley wrote as follows: "In my opinion the extent of the influence and territory of this one man becomes a matter of anxiety to every friend to the British interests in India. He now embraces the whole extent of our frontier and of that of the Nizam, and in his person we experience that which we learn all our policy ought to be directed to prevent, viz. one man holding and exercising nearly all, if not all, the power of the Maratha Empire."²

(b) *Trained Europeanised Infantry*—The Marathas had europeanised their armies under French instruction. Their infantry had acquired a fairly satisfactory state of discipline and all Maratha

¹ Owen : *Selections from Wellington's Despatches*, p. 287.

² Owen : *Selections from Wellington's Despatches*, p. 193.

armies possessed a powerful park of artillery. They constituted a menace to the territories of the Company, which it was idle to ignore. Marquess of Wellesley in his letter to his brother wrote that Sindia did possess the power to endanger the security of the Company, because of "the efficient state of Sindia's military establishment, under the direction of European officers and particularly the formidable condition of his regular infantry and artillery under the command of those officers."¹

(c) *The warlike basis and tradition of the Maratha Empire*—Owing to its peculiar organisation and tradition, the Maratha Empire lived by war and for war. It was the fatal legacy of the imperial adventure. It made a continuous demand for tribute on its neighbours. The Marathas made many complicated claims on the Nizam and frequently plundered his territories. In the absence of a stable political economy in their own states, the Marathas subsisted on what they could get elsewhere. This was particularly expected after the terrible civil war towards the end of the 18th century. According to Wellesley, "the territory round Poona to a considerable extent having been entirely desolated by the troops of Holkar, that Chieftain would have been compelled to invade the territories of the Nizam or to penetrate into the coun-

¹ Owen: *Selections from Wellesley's Despatches*, p. 412.

try situated to the south of the river Kistna, for the subsistence of his numerous troops and followers.”¹ In fact like all warlike states, their very bankruptcy would have compelled them to make war on the Company and its allies.

(d) *The power and position of M. Perron and his Jahgir state*—The French officers, who were in the employ of the Maratha states, had acquired a great influence and power and were a nucleus round which an anti-British combination of Indian powers could easily have been formed. M. Perron was a particularly important man. In a secret letter to General Lake directing him to undertake operations against Sindia in the north, Marquess of Wellesley made his views on M. Perron quite clear. M. Perron had created an efficient force of 8000 infantry and 8000 cavalry, for whose maintenance Sindia had assigned to him large territories on the Jumna. M. Perron had formed an independent state out of it. “The inhabitants of this territory considered M. Perron as their immediate sovereign, while the troops supported from the revenues of the country, regarded M. Perron as the immediate executive authority, from which the army was to receive orders, subsistence and pay.”² The power of M. Perron was most dangerous to

¹ Owen : *Selections from Wellesley's Despatches*, p. 357.

² *Notes relative to the late transactions in the Maratha Empire*, p. 52.

the British for the following reasons: (i) Firstly, he had created practically an independent French state under his own immediate control, in the territories assigned to him for the maintenance of his battalions. It was well-known that "Sindia" retained no efficient control over M. Perron or over his regular troops. (ii) Secondly, M. Perron had shown his anti-British tendency by dismissing all the British officers from the employment of Sindia. (iii) Thirdly, on account of his positions south of the Jumna, and holding Delhi and Agra as he did, M. Perron was in a position to take offensive action against the territories of the Company, in Bihar and Bengal. (iv) Fourthly, M. Perron and his forces were in possession of the person of the Moghul Emperor and therefore wielded his nominal authority. The French could certainly have made dangerous use of this great instrument in their hands.¹

Thus those who justify British expansionist policy argue that it was necessary to secure the British possessions against three great menaces. Firstly, the rivalry and danger of the French, secondly, the danger from the Mysore state and its alliance with the French and thirdly the menace of the Maratha power.

¹ Owen : *Selections from Wellesley's Despatches*, pp. 303-16.

MEASURES OF POLICY AND ACTION ADOPTED
BY THE BRITISH TO COUNTERACT THE
ABOVE MENACES AND TO EXPAND
BRITISH POWER IN INDIA

They could be grouped under the following major heads :

(1) *The Subsidiary alliances*

The French had started the practice of maintaining military forces with Indian powers for the latter's protection against more pugnacious neighbours, and for which these powers paid either by an annual grant or by cession of territory, yielding equivalent revenue. Clive as well as Warren Hastings made extensive use of it in Bengal, Karnatak, and Oudh. Though Cornwallis did not materially extend it, he did not go back upon it. It was Marquess of Wellesley, however, who first used it for a rapid expansion of British power and not merely for the defence of existing rights and possessions as his predecessors had done before him. He persuaded the Indian States, such as the Nizam and the Peshwa, to enter into subsidiary alliance with the Company. By these subsidiary alliances the British were able to remove French influence at these Courts, whether actual or potential. Thereby, the number of possible French allies was substantially reduced. The subsidiary alliances further ensured the security

of the long frontiers of the Company, by reducing many of the neighbouring powers to the position of subsidiary allies. But the greatest gain, which the company obtained from these alliances, was the increase in its military resources and power at no additional cost to itself. "The subsidiary alliance system gives the British government a more complete command over the military resources of the countries to which it extends, and better security against treacherous combinations on the part of native powers and popular insurrection on the part of their subjects, than probably could be obtained by any other means." (Minutes of Evidence, East India Affairs Committee, 1832, Vol. VI, p. 1) The subsidiary ally engaged himself to maintain a stipulated force of the Company within his territories and to furnish a specified contingent to co-operate with the Company's forces, in case the Company was at war with another power. Further, the Company could control the foreign relations of the allied Indian Powers. In case the Company was at war with a third power, the geographical position of the territories of the allies and the disposition of the Company's forces, ensured that fighting would take place either in the territories of the enemy or in the territories of the subsidiary ally. The territories of the Company itself were spared the ravages of war and it was enabled to use its resources unimpaired by the

temporary fortune of war. In effect, the military frontier of the Company was pushed far ahead of its political frontier.

But this security of British possessions was purchased at too high a price, if we consider the effect of it on the populations living in these subsidiary allied states. As Sir Thomas Munro wrote: "There are many weighty objections to the employment of a subsidiary force. It has a natural tendency to render the government of every country in which it exists, weak and oppressive, to extinguish all honourable feeling among the higher classes of society and to degrade and impoverish the whole people. The usual remedy of a bad government in India, is a quiet revolution in the palace or a violent one by rebellion or foreign conquest. But the presence of a British force cuts off every chance of remedy by supporting the prince on throne, against every foreign and domestic enemy."

(2) *Dismissal of Europeans from the service
of Indian states*

The British insisted on the dismissal of all Europeans from service in all allied Indian states and particularly Europeans of those nationalities, whose governments pursued an anti-British policy. The Nizam was persuaded to give up his French

officers. One of the chief conditions for continued peace with Tipoo, was the dismissal of Frenchmen from his service. According to the British, the Frenchmen in the service of Indian powers not only intrigued against the British, but materially increased the military efficiency of those Indian powers whom they served. Arthur Wellesley even claimed though with scant justification that "the necessity of guarding against the French influence was one of the principal causes of the Treaty of Bassein."¹

(3) *The destruction of Maratha power and
Tipoo Sultan by force*

In destroying Tipoo, the British were guided by the motive of reducing the power of an implacable, energetic and talented enemy, who had power to endanger their security and who was the ally of the French. In reducing the Maratha power by force, if necessary, Wellesley had the following objects in view: (i) The destruction of their trained battalions. Marquess of Wellesley wrote to General Lake that the most desirable object was "the entire reduction of M. Perron's regular corps. This operation necessarily included the capture or destruction of his artillery and military stores."² (ii) Obtaining possession of the person

¹ Owen : *Selections from Wellesley's Despatches*, p. 274.

² Owen : *Selections from Wellesley's Despatches*, p. 308.

of the Moghul. (iii) "Early and effectual demolition of the French state erected by M. Perron on the banks of the Jamna,"¹ and the occupation of Delhi, Agra, Baroach, Ahmednager and Bundelkhand. (iv) Prevention of either Sindia and Holkar from dominating the Maratha Empire. This was achieved by controlling the Peshwa at Poona, under the Treaty of Bassein concluded with him and the consequent unopposed march of A. Wellesley to Poona. (v) The defence of the Nizam against the Marathas. Unless the complicated question of Maratha claims on the Nizam was satisfactorily solved there could be no permanent peace in the Peninsula. The territories of the Nizam were a buffer between the Marathas and the Company and, therefore, the defence of the Nizam was a matter of absolute necessity to the Company. In fact, "the immediate cause of the war was the refusal of the Confederates to separate and withdraw to their usual stations within their respective territories, the armies which they had assembled and united on the frontier of our ally, the Subhadar of the Deccan, after having declared that the intention of the junction was to decide whether there should be peace or war with the British government and its allies."²

¹ Owen : *Selections from Wellesley's Despatches*, p. 311.

² Owen : *Selections from Wellesley's Despatches*, p. 411.

- (4) *Encirclement of Indian powers by cutting them off from the sea—i.e., take possession of the provinces of Gujrath, Malabar and Cuttock.*

British policy throughout sought to acquire these maritime provinces, and thereby not only to insulate the two Indian Powers—namely, Mysore and the Marathas—from foreign intercourse, but to obtain valuable economic, military, and territorial “advantages.” British control of the coast-line of the Indian Peninsula could prevent the landing of an invading French force far more effectively than British superiority on the Indian Ocean could possibly do. Further, by depriving the Indians of access to the sea, the Indian powers were robbed of the means to replenish their military resources from foreign sources. Any French help that Tipoo could get would have had to come by the harbours on the Malabar Coast. As the Government of Bombay observed to General Abercromby, “The territory from Goa to Cochin, from the sea-coast to the Ghauts, includes a country valuable in every respect of situation, revenue and commerce; by fortifying the passes in the mountains, it may be defended with a small body of troops and by our having possession of the ports, Tipoo will be cut off from all communication with the French and other European powers, who have hitherto supplied him with military stores and he will thereby be effectually excluded

from a very essential resource for carrying on future wars."¹ That was why Wellesley demanded a surrender of the Malabar Coast as one of the principal conditions of continued peace with Tipoo. Similarly, during the war with the Marathas, the British quickly occupied the sea-port of Baroach and its dependent territory, the forts of Champaner and Pawangarh with the whole of Sindia's territory in the province of Gujrath, situated to the northwards of Baroach. Marquess Wellesley gave considerable importance to the acquisition of these territories, since he considered that the military resources of Sindia were improved because of "the facility which the possession of the seaport of Baroach afforded to Sindia, of improving his military establishment, by the accession of French or other European officers, of military supplies and stores etc., and even of a body of French or other European troops."² A commanding position in Gujrath was a definite object of British policy. The military importance of Gujrath was well-understood among British military circles. On this subject, General Stuart wrote in 1800 as follows: "The possession of Gujrath would be attended with military and commercial advantages of the first importance."³

¹ *Poona Residence Correspondence*, Vol. III. p. 585.

² Owen: *Selections from Wellesley's Despatches*, p. 412.

³ Owen: *Selections from Wellesley's Despatches*, p. 575.

Gujrath was a rich country and produced all the cotton in India which was exported to Europe and China. If the British occupied Gujrath they could obtain a large revenue, which would have been very welcome to the low finances of the Company. Further advantage which the Company could get from a commanding position in Gujrath, was that it would enable the British to operate against the territories of Zaman Shah, which lay on the Indus, should that king attempt to carry out his threat of invading India. On the other hand, if a European power, particularly the French in the Red sea, invaded India and took possession of Gujrath, it would have secured them on the mainland of India and therefore they had to be forestalled. As for Cuttock, the British had coveted the province for a considerable time. Cornwallis wrote as follows regarding it. "The acquisition of Cuttock would be of so much solid value to the Company, that I need hardly repeat that I should not scruple to grant any reasonable conditions or to take any justifiable public measures for the accomplishing of it."¹ British desire to possess it was dictated by two advantages which they expected to get from it. By acquiring the province, the British could cut the communications between the Raja of Nagpur and the French

¹ *Poona Residency Correspondence*, (Malet's Embassy), p. 141.

and secondly, they could connect by land, the British territories in Bengal with those in Madras. As Marquess of Wellesley wrote, the possession of Cuttock enabled the Raja of Berar "to interrupt the communications between our northern and southern possessions, to facilitate the invasion of Bengal, of the northern Sircars, and to obtain the aid of the French."¹

¹ Owen : *Selections from Wellesley's Despatches*, p. 414.

CHAPTER VI

THE BRITISH CONQUEST—III

THE UNREALITY OF FRENCH, TIPOO'S AND MARATHA MENACES: THE REAL CAUSE OF BRITISH EXPANSION

It is doubtful if the British statesmen were accurate in the assumptions that they made before pursuing those policies and measures already mentioned. They made in fact an exaggerated estimate of the menace which the French, Tipoo Sultan and the Marathas spelt for the Company, either separately or combined. There was great criticism of British measures in India both in their general policy and with regard to the individual historic events. From the letters, despatches and communications connected with British policy in India, the decisive factor which seems to have weighed with them was the injury they thought they did to French interests and influence. No doubt the French were jealous of British possessions in India and it appears that Napoleon conquered Egypt as a stepping-stone to a subsequent invasion of India, either via Persia and the north-western frontier of India or via the

Red Sea. At the time Wellesley arrived in India he was not alone in appreciating the magnitude of the French threat. The Secret Committee of the Court of Directors, in their instructions to Marquess Wellesley, in the letter dated the 18th June 1798, made their suspicions of French designs quite clear. They said, "Our empire in the East has ever been an object of jealousy to the French and we know that their former Government entertained sanguine hopes of being able to reach India, by a shorter passage than round the Cape of Good Hope, and we have no doubt that the present government would risk a great deal and even adopt measures of the most enterprising and uncommon nature, for the chance of reducing, if not annihilating, the British power and consequence in that quarter of the world."¹

(1) *The French menace was exaggerated*

Thus it appears that the fear of a French invasion of India was based entirely on two considerations, namely, the aggressive and ambitious policy of the French government and secondly, the occupation of Egypt by Napoleon. These two considerations had appeared very weighty during 1798-99, but neither before nor later was the French invasion of India, either by sea or land, either

¹ Owen : *Selections from Wellesley's Despatches*, p. 3.

practicable or imminent, in view of the continental commitments of France and her peculiar difficulties for prosecuting an oversea war. Consciously or unconsciously, the British ignored those difficulties in the path of France, which made a French invasion well-nigh impossible. These difficulties were the following:—

(a) *The isolation of the French Expeditionary Force in Egypt*—In the invasion of India, by land, the French force in Egypt could not obtain an active alliance of the Turks and the Persians, nor could their invading force hope to maintain an active uninterrupted line of communications with France, for reinforcements and supplies. Napoleon's project, if he really seriously intended to carry it out, of invading India from Egypt through Asia, was still born almost as soon as he reached Egypt. His communications with France were broken by the defeat of the French ships at the battle of the Nile, and he could not hope for any reinforcements of men or material. Besides, the hostile attitude of the Turks compelled him to consolidate his occupation of lower Egypt, where he had to improvise a base of supplies for his limited army of occupation. The effective range of operations of this small army and its limited resources, was so far circumscribed that he could not take Acre. With these facts, French danger could easily be over-estimated. Mill gives a very violent

opinion on the question. "The additional chance of invasion by the presence in Egypt of the French, presented as far as it went, a demand for additional security. But that chance was to be weighed and its value ascertained. Except to an eye surrounded by the mists of passion or ignorance, which saw its object hideously enlarged it could not appear to be great."¹

(b) *Naval inferiority of the French*—The entire history of the French in India must be viewed with the background of a British superiority on the Indian seas. The chances, therefore, of a French Expeditionary Force transported in ships reaching India, in strength sufficiently formidable to endanger British possessions, were even smaller than those of a land invasion. It was well-known that France did not possess transport ships sufficiently numerous or strong to carry a large expedition over oceanic distances. Arthur Wellesley observed, "I don't believe, he (Tipoo) would accept nor do I believe she (France) could transport a larger number than three thousand men."² During time of peace so large an expedition would have at once aroused the suspicion of the British government, who would have taken effective measures to counteract its menace. In time of war, a secret expedition

¹ Mill : *History of India*, (Ed. Wilson), Vol. VI, p. 106.

² Owen : *Selections from Wellington's Despatches*, p. 41.

would have been practically impossible because the British navy kept a close blockade of the coasts of France. As soon as a French force would have left the British government would have known about it. Even if the French had succeeded in eluding the British blockade off the French coast, they would have had to pass the British squadron off the Cape of Good Hope and be prepared to meet the British naval forces off the Indian coast. It was so hazardous a venture that it would not have succeeded had it been tried and the French never did really attempt it. Without a command of the sea to maintain uninterrupted communications, no overseas expedition could be successful. Besides, the French were engaged in perpetual contest on the European continent, in which they were so successful that they succeeded in conquering for a time nearly the whole of Europe. Their energies in men, money and material were concentrated on the European struggle, with the consequence that the French navy was starved of talent, money and prestige. In spite of the supposed offensive and defensive alliance, Tipoo could only obtain 150 men from Mauritius. During the French revolutionary period, as long as the French had to face new coalitions, formed by British diplomacy and gold, the chances of a strong French force being sent to India were very small. Finally, British statesmen in England on account of a closer

touch with the European situation, were in a better position to judge the probability of a French invasion of India than were the British statesmen in India. In March 1803, when war with France was shortly expected to be renewed and Napoleon was making military preparations in the ports of France and Holland and was undoubtedly at the zenith of his power, Castlereagh wrote as follows, regarding the French menace to India. He said: "I am sure your lordship, will keep in view how much will be gained in positive strength by directing our exertions, even in war, against the debt so long as there is little appearance of the enemy being able to menace India. However jealous France is of our power in the East, and however steady she may be in her purpose of aiming at positions, from which she might hope one day to shake that power, yet I cannot persuade myself that she has or can have for a length of time, the means to attempt any direct attack against possessions so well-defended as ours are by the army now on foot."¹ Curiously enough, in July 1803, Marquess of Wellesley was of the same opinion! He wrote as follows: "The degree of danger to be apprehended from France, during the existence of war, is in my opinion, inconsiderable in the present state of our power in India, provided that power be duly ex-

¹ Owen : *Selections from Wellesley's Despatches*, p. 582.

erted in maintaining a commanding superiority in these seas, and in preserving our European and native land-forces in a state of complete efficiency and strength."¹

(c) *Over-estimation of French intrigue at Indian Courts*—Further the concern which Marquess of Wellesley displayed regarding the influence and intrigue which the Frenchmen in the service of Indian powers carried on, was unnecessary. "In the state of mind by which the Governor-General and Englishmen of his intellectual and moral cast, were at that time distinguished, the very existence of a Frenchman was a cause of alarm."² These Frenchmen were mostly purely mercenary adventurers, who possessed insufficient contact with the government of their country to carry on an intrigue in national interests. Even M. Perron was not so mindful of national interests as might have been expected of him, unless he believed that in his personal power in India, no national interests were involved. He was quite willing to sell his power at a price as is clear from the following: "It will be highly desirable to detach M. Perron from Sindia's service by pacific negotiation. M. Perron's inclination certainly is to dispose of his power to a French purchaser; but I should not be

¹ Owen : *Selections from Wellesley's Despatches*, p. 585.

² Mill : *History of British India*, (Ed. Wilson), Vol. VI, p. 81.

surprised if he were to be found ready to enter into terms with your Excellency provided he could obtain sufficient security for his personal interests”¹ (Marquess of Wellesley to General Lake).

(2) *The menace of the power of Mysore*

Before and after the Second Mysore War, the power of Haidar and Tipoo was undoubtedly formidable and British offensive operations against it had proved unsuccessful because of the Parthian mode of war, practised by Haidar’s cavalry. However, this power was never sufficiently strong to jeopardise the very existence of British political consequence in the Peninsula, without the aid of a European ally. By the Third Mysore War, Tipoo’s power was very materially reduced and could not become a danger any further, to the British. He could secure very little help from the French and the presumed offensive and defensive alliance produced no more than 150 men from Mauritius. As for the danger he represented to the company, it was insignificant because by the end of the 18th century no Indian power was equal to the Company in the military sense. As General Stuart correctly observed: “no native state can ever be very formidable without the assistance of an ally and there is but little reason of apprehen-

¹ Owen : *Selections from Wellesley’s Despatches*, p. 315.

sion from their aggrandisement by an extension of territory, as long as that is confined to the inland countries.”¹ No doubt on account of the weakness of the Nizam, the civil war in the Maratha country and the low finances of the Company, Tipoo had temporarily improved his relative position, but he had not become quite so formidable as to leave the issue of war between him and the Company in any sense doubtful. When J. Webb wrote for the Government of Madras, in July 1798, he drew a black picture of the Company’s position; but the disadvantages of Tipoo were even greater than those of the Company, and he was not as powerful as he was in 1790. Marquess of Wellesley in his letter to General Harris dated February 1799 wrote as follows : “The enemy’s country, the nature of his resources, the strength of his defences and the character of his force, are subjects familiar to the whole of your staff. . . . On the other hand, Tipoo Sultan’s army is known to have suffered essentially both in numbers and discipline, since the last war. His finances are in great disorder; he no longer possesses the confidence of his army, his councils are distracted by a variety of contending factions, and his spirits are dejected and broken by the disappointment of his hopes of French assistance, by the retreat of Zaman Shah,

¹ Op. cit.

by the failure of his intrigues at the Courts of Poona and Hyderabad, and by the unexampled vigour, alacrity and extent of our military preparations.”¹ That Tipoo entertained no offensive designs at the time he was attacked, is clear from the fact that he made no preparations for an offensive operation against the Company, but contented himself with defending his territories. “It is a curious fact that.....Tipoo seems to have made no extraordinary preparations for this war. His army was, indeed, in good order and far from despicable in point of numbers; but it was neither stronger nor better appointed, when General Harris passed the frontier than it had been during many months previously.”² As Mr. Webb mentioned above said: “No rupture with Tipoo was to be apprehended but by our own provocation.” Even Arthur Wellesley expressed the same opinion. He said: “If we are to have a war at all, it must be of our own creating; a justifiable one, I acknowledge, one we shall think necessary, not on account of any danger which we immediately apprehend, but one which we suppose may eventually be the consequence of this alliance with the French, and in order to punish Tipoo for a breach of faith with us.”³

¹ Owen : *Selections from Wellesley's Despatches*, p. 95.

² Gleig : *British Empire in India*, Vol. III, p. 154.

³ Owen : *Selections from Wellington's Despatches*, p. 41.

Thus the destruction of Tipoo's power was a ruthless act. Many have condemned Marquess of Wellesley for it on moral grounds; some have justified it on grounds of political expediency; in either case, most historians think that Wellesley does not come off well in the judgment of modern history. This condemnation is largely due to a tendency among historians to take isolated events or episodes in history and judge them in the manner of a moral inquisitor, as if political actions are personal acts of the chief actors in history. The fall of the Moghul Empire and the early destruction of Maratha nationalism, had created in India a political void. It had to be filled by the inevitable process of a strong power emerging as paramount. The Company was unquestionably the only really powerful state in India, the others being in various stages of decay and decomposition. Marquess of Wellesley, therefore, established the inevitable supremacy of the Company in a short time and in a less bloody manner, than would have been the case had he followed the more cautious policy advised to him. In history, events of great importance, have seldom taken place without a violent destruction of the old, though historians subsequently attempt to justify or condemn them on moral grounds. Organic historical events occur in a way that makes moral judgments irrelevant.

(3) *The Maratha Bogey was equally insubstantial*

The first Maratha War could hardly be described as an outcome of Maratha aggressiveness, since it was the Bombay government that initiated it by attempting to place Raghoba, on the Peshwaship. It was since the fall of Tipoo, therefore, that the Company and the Marathas came in closer political contact. But the menace of the Marathas to British power was equally groundless. In his attack on Tipoo, Marquess of Wellesley's case was fortified by the blank cheque he had received from the Court of Directors. The Secret Committee of the Court of Directors, wrote to him as follows : ".....and should you judge either from his answers or from the steps that he is taking that his designs are such as the French Proclamation represents....., we think it will be more advisable not to wait for such an attack but to take the most immediate and most decisive measures to carry our arms into our enemy's country.... We rely upon your using the latitude allowed you in the preceding paragraph with the utmost discretion, that we may not be involved in a war in India, without the most inevitable necessity, of which necessity we leave you to be the sole judge."¹ But Marquess of Wellesley was not allowed the same

¹ Owen : *Selections from Wellesley's Despatches*, p. 3.

latitude in his policy towards the Marathas. In his general policy towards the Maratha Empire he was severely criticised by the authorities in England. The fall of Tipoo had changed the balance of power very much in favour of the Company, who became indisputably the strongest military power in India. As Castlereagh remarked in 1804, British power in India was too firmly consolidated and the prospect of attack from any quarter too remote, to justify its risking a preventive war with the Marathas. Far from being a menace, the Maratha Empire was the sick man of India at the close of the 18th century. It was decayed and exhausted in the manner shown earlier, and in military resource it was far from being equal to the effective power of the Company. This was clear from the following considerations:—

(a) *The lack of cohesion and singleness of purpose*—The Maratha Empire lacked union. The feudatory powers which constituted it were utterly divided among themselves. The jealousy, hatred and suspicion of the members of the Confederacy towards each other precluded any possibility of union. The power of the Peshwa was inconsiderable. No doubt the Marathas openly talked about the common enemy and combination against him, but internal strife made such a combination impossible. Bhosle of Nagpur claimed the kingship of the Maratha Empire, while the animosity between

Sindia and Holkar was so great that nothing could bring them together. How far this civil strife had gone is clear from the following. "By reference to the records of the day, it will be seen what pains were taken by the Confederates to bring Holkar's army in active co-operation in the Deccan; and if that chief had performed his engagements with Sindia, I cannot pretend to say that I should have brought the army through its difficulties. Amrut Rao intercepted a letter from Sindia to the Peshwa, in which Sindia urged his highness to break his alliance with the English and promised that as soon as we should be defeated, he (Sindia) should join with the Raja of Nagpur and the Peshwa, to destroy Holkar. Amrut Rao sent this letter to Holkar and the consequence was that Holkar after he had made two marches to the southward with a view to co-operate with the Confederates, returned and crossed the Nurbadda and in point of fact never struck a blow; on the contrary he was in friendly communication with me throughout the war."¹ (A. Wellesley to Rt. Hon. R. Dundas.)

(b) *The economic ruin of the Maratha country in the civil war*—The Maratha powers were financially bankrupt and their territories were ruined by the civil war. The financial strength of these powers

¹ Owen : *Selections from Wellington's Despatches*, p. 350.

was very poor, because having mortgaged most of their territories to bankers, they had no latent resources to fall back upon. Had the Marathas been powerful enough to menace the security of the Company in an offensive war, they would never have let the Company's troops occupy Poona without a challenge. Holkar himself though powerful had no stable resources at all. The following judgment of Marquess of Wellesley was not altogether wrong: "The situation of Holkar is precarious and accidental; the instability of the resources of that adventurer reduces the continuance of his power to the utmost degree of uncertainty and absolutely deprives him of the means of opposing any systematic or formidable resistance to the operation of our alliance with the state of Poona." As for the Deccan, it was absolutely ruined by the civil war. "They have not left a stick standing at the distance of 150 miles from Poona; they have eaten the forage and the grain, have pulled down the houses and have used the material as firewood and the inhabitants are fled with their cattle. Excepting in one village, I have never seen a human creature since I quitted the neighbourhood of Meritch."¹ The ruin of the country was so great that in 1804 there was a great famine all over the Deccan.

¹ Gurwood: *Wellington's Despatches*, (New Ed.), Vol. I, p. 508.

(c) *The great weakness of Sindia*—One of the curious facts about the British attitude towards the Marathas was their consistent under-estimation of the effective power of Holkar and their belief that Sindia was far more powerful than he really was. In fact according to them, the menace of the Marathas was symbolised in the power of Sindia and particularly in his French officers and their trained battalions. But in fact, Sindia's power had much declined towards the close of the 18th century. Firstly, he had suffered severe losses in his war against Holkar and his military prestige was much reduced. Secondly, Sindia was weakened on account of his mistaken policy of acquiring control at Poona. His preoccupation in the Deccan gave his opponents and vassals in the north a great opportunity to undermine his power and reduce his influence in Hindustan. In his ambition to get control of the power at Poona, he neglected his affairs in the north, the base on which his power mainly depended. M. Perron's independence was a measure of Sindia's weakness.

Thus not only were the Marathas no menace to the British but their attitude towards the English was uniformly friendly and they scrupulously abstained from offering any provocation to the Company. In spite of all the hard things that were said about the Marathas, the British never had cause to complain on that score. Castlereagh

makes it clear in the following statement: "The Marathas have never in any instance commenced hostilities against us. When by taking part in their internal disputes, we have been at war with any of the Maratha states, they have availed themselves of the first opening for peace and have shown forbearance and humanity to a British army more than once when in difficulty. So far then as past experience goes, there seems no special ground to apprehend future danger from the Marathas."¹ No doubt they resented the Treaty of Basscin, partly because it frustrated the long-cherished and conflicting ambitions of both Sindia and Holkar and also because of the loss of independence which the head of the empire had suffered through the Treaty. As Castlereagh pointed out, "the fact" was indisputable that "a general repugnance to the British connection, on the terms proposed, prevailed among the great Maratha powers."

(4) *The critical attitude of the authorities
in England*

Thus in spite of the absence of any real menace from the Marathas, Wellesley precipitated a preventive war, with them by forming the subsidiary alliance with the Peshwa. Lord Castlereagh the President of the Board of Control, strongly oppos-

¹ Owen : *Selections from Wellesley's Despatches*, p. 254.

ed the aggressive policy of Wellesley.¹ He suggested that since the destruction of Tipoo, there was no need to have a close connection with the Maratha powers. According to him the Governor-General should have followed either of the three following courses in his attitude towards the Marathas: (i) Either the British should have helped Sindia and the Peshwa to suppress the rebellion of Holkar and form subsidiary engagements with them, without stationing the subsidiary force, within their territories; (ii) or, the British should have offered in conjunction with the Raja of Berar, a "disinterested mediation;" (iii) or they should have assisted Sindia to re-establish the authority of the Peshwa, in return for the expenses of the expedition and compensation in Gujraht, without however forming any alliance either with Sindia or Peshwa.

From the point of view of Lord Castlereagh, therefore, the Company was already so strong as not to need a Maratha alliance "With such an empire (as the Company possessed) a Maratha connection may be a very good thing, if it can be had without mixing us too deeply in their internal disturbances, or leading to an extension of dominion beyond our purpose, but we are too strong to require it. Our wisest policy is to place our dependence in that quarter in the consolidation

¹ Owen: *Selections from Wellesley's Despatches*, pp. 255-264.

and improvement of what we already possess.”¹

The secret committee of the Court of Directors were of the same opinion as Lord Castlereagh. They were quite willing to modify the Treaty of Bassein, in such a way as to make it more acceptable to the majority of the Maratha powers, by renouncing those articles of the treaty, which gave most offence. They wrote: “Our wish is that it should be expressly stipulated in an additional article of the Treaty that the subsidiary force shall hereafter be stationed within the Company’s territories.....We entertain great doubts, whether it is desirable regard being had to the character and complexion, which it is the object to give to the alliance to stipulate for a general right of arbitration as between the Peshwa and other states. Such a right must in itself create much jealousy and we are inclined to think that it would be on the whole better not to push our claim of arbitrating too far.”²

Marquess of Wellesley, therefore, pursued a policy which the authorities in England did not encourage. The difference arose on account of the totally distinct aims that the two had in view. The authorities in England considered the reduction of debt and the consolidation of already ac-

¹ Owen : *Selections from Wellesley’s Despatches*, p. 264.

² Owen : *Selections from Wellesley’s Despatches*, p. 271.

quired territories, as far more important than further acquisition of power and new territories. Castlereagh assumed the aim of Indian policy as follows: "The proposed end in view" is "a defensive alliance and guarantee, connecting the Marathas with the Nizam and the Company and through that League preserving the peace of India." On the other hand, the Marquess of Wellesley though professing defence and the scotching of the Maratha "hydra," was following an aggressive policy, because the condition of India promised its successful execution.

(5) *The true cause of British expansion
in India.*

The internal condition of the Maratha Empire had brought so much discord and weakness and the willingness of the Peshwa to enter into subordinate alliance with the Company was so opportune, as to make that Empire an easy prey to any power, which could use force with quickness and decision. It was the culpable weakness of the Marathas and the favourable opportunity of destroying their power, which made Marquess of Wellesley so reluctant to give up those advantages which the British had acquired by the Treaty of Basscin. In this connection, Barlow quite justifiably asked, "When can we hope to have all India again at our command?" After all as he showed,

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the Gaekwar was an active ally of the English and the Raja of Berar possessed "neither military knowledge nor military resources." In fact, politically as well as militarily, the position of the Company in 1803-4-5 was very favourable for a most decisive and overwhelming blow against the power of the Marathas. The weakness of the Peshwa and the Nizam gave the Company a most suitable opportunity and excuse to place the subsidiary force within the territories of these two princes. The military advantages to the Company of these forces so stationed, were one of the decisive factors in the overthrow of the Maratha power. With the military stations acquired in Gujraht, at Poona and in the Nizam's dominions, the Company acquired advanced bases close to the forces and territories of the Confederates, against whom the Company could initiate immediate offensive operations. On this point Arthur Wellesley expressed himself as follows: "I have to observe that, as in order to defend the Peshwa against the attempts of either of those chiefs, to establish an influence at his Durbar by means of an armed force, it would be necessary to bring the troops from a great distance; and they would have to arrive and operate in a country in which no magazine or establishment would have been formed for them. I can have no doubt respecting the expediency as a military question of establishing the subsidiary force within

the Peshwa's territories."¹

The real cause of British expansion, therefore, was neither the menace of non-Indian powers nor that of Indian powers. The true cause lay in the existence of two factors. They were:

Firstly, the great weakness of Indian powers.

Secondly, the internal geography of India. The internal geography of the country deprived Indian states of natural frontiers and their defence against each other became very difficult. At the same time it made it incumbent on the strongest power in the country to carry on war, until it brought the entire country under its sway. Indian historical development shows that perpetual war goes on in the country unless, either a foreign power conquers the land or a power rises in India itself which subdues all others. A void had been created in India by the anarchy of the 18th century after the fall of the Moghul Empire and an early extinction of Maratha nationalism. This void had to be filled and the Company was unquestionably the strongest power in India and, therefore, alone qualified to fill the void by subduing the entire country.

To sum up: the rise of the British power in India from a second rate position to that of virtual paramountcy can be traced to the expansionist

¹ Owen : *Selections from Wellesley's Despatches*, pp. 291-92.

policy of Marquess of Wellesley. He used the military superiority of the Company to establish its political domination. The British justified their expansionist policy by pleading that the Company's possessions in India were threatened by the French, by the power of Mysore and by the Marathas. But they won many subsidiary allies and overcame these dangers by a great increase in the political and military power of the Company. This was accomplished by a military overthrow of Tipoo and the Marathas. However, the grounds on which this expansion was justified were insubstantial. The French had no chance of invading India without a command of the sea and with the continental wars on their hands. In spite of his restlessness, the power of Tipoo was hardly equal to that of the Company and he did not want to attack the Company. Finally, the Marathas who were the strongest of Indian powers had become too weak through discord, civil war, financial bankruptcy, poor leadership and the decay of the national and military spirit of the nation, to endanger the security of the Company.

The real cause of British expansion was the weakness of the Indian states, which made expansion easy and profitable. Besides the internal geography of India compelled the Company to attain peace in India by conquering the whole country.

CHAPTER VII

THE MILITARY ADVANTAGES OF THE BRITISH

Since the conquest was a result of British military preponderance, it is necessary to show that during the latter half of the 18th century, the Company possessed certain military advantages that ranked her easily as the strongest military power in India.

The problem of the military historian of India

The historian of the British conquest of India is confronted with an important question. What made the British military so effective and overwhelming? What were the causes of the sudden and signal overthrow of such powerful states as those of Tipoo and the Marathas? This question has not received all the attention that it deserves.

The rapid and unfailing success of the expansionist policy initiated by Marquess of Wellesley depended upon the possession of a powerful military force, which could overwhelm any opposition which the Indian states could bring, because without an effective military instrument, no expansionist policy could be successful in the long

run. If any proof is needed of the superiority of the Company in the military sphere, it is furnished by the ease with which India was conquered. The fact becomes all the more striking if it is remembered that the British troops in India were numerically very small in comparison with the forces which Indian powers were in the habit of maintaining. The Indian establishment of the Company was no doubt large and though Indian troops fought well on numerous occasions their main task was the occupation of conquered territory and were, therefore, auxiliary troops. As Munro said: "Our power depends essentially upon Europeans." The Company depended on the white troops for all important and critical operations. All the same including the Indian troops the forces of the Company were always inferior numerically to those of the enemy. At the time of the Fourth Mysore war, the Company had an establishment of 80,000 men though only 20,000 of them could be used in the operations against Tipoo Sultan, who had an army twice as large in the field. In 1800 A.D. the number of European troops in India was only 14,000 men and the number of British troops necessary for all eventualities was considered to be 30,000 men out of which 18,000 could at all times be spared for field operations. Marquess of Wellesley, who always thought in terms of an offensive strategy did not demand more than 31,000 British troops

for an adequate defence of India. Thus the vast continent of India was conquered by the British with trifling forces. As Lord Castlereagh pointed out, a territory inhabited by fifty million people, was governed by a civil and military complement of 30,000 Europeans. No doubt the total military force inclusive of Indian troops was over 1,15,000 men, but was it excessive if compared to that of Aurangzeb, for example, who was the lord of nine hundred thousand horsemen? The following were some of the positive causes of British military superiority:—

1. *A resourceful diplomatic policy*

In the diplomatic field the British were at once, more subtle and consistent than the Indian powers, who had hardly a settled foreign or diplomatic policy. In national defence, diplomacy plays as important a part as the defence forces themselves. For the prosecution of a successful war, considerable amount of diplomatic preparation is generally necessary before operations actually begin. In this diplomatic activity, the aim of every state is to collect as many allies as possible and ensure the neutrality of the potential allies of the enemy. In this aim the British were far more successful than their Indian opponents. In almost every war that the British fought in India, with the important exception of the First

Maratha War, they not only obtained many important allies and found partisans even in the camps of the enemy, but so divided the ranks of the enemy Indian states as to deal with them one by one and destroy them piecemeal. Thus even before the war started, the British in Madras were authorised by Marquess of Wellesley to intrigue with the enemies of Tipoo Sultan, particularly Meer Allam and to make secret advances to the deposed family of the Raja of Mysore. In the Third Mysore war, Cornwallis was successful in ensuring a tardy but active co-operation of the Nizam and the Peshwa against Tipoo Sultan. When the Fourth War started, Tipoo unhelpt by the Marathas was crushed in two months. Similarly, in the Second Maratha War the Peshwa, the Gackawar and the Southern Maratha Jahgirdars were the allies of the Company and while Sindia and Bhosle were being overwhelmed, Holkar maintained an unconcerned neutrality. Thus treachery and absence of unity among the enemy appear to have considerably simplified the task of the British. The British isolated their immediate enemy and destroyed him utterly. The most important cause of this absence of a settled diplomatic outlook and consistent foreign policy dictated by the interests of the state, was that the Indian states were private possessions of individuals, many of whom were adventurers. Under the circumstances, the only policy these

Princes could be expected to follow, was the one which ensured them the quiet private possession of their territories. That is why British protection was most welcome to most of these princes, many of whom entered into an alliance with the British to safeguard themselves against the encroachments of some of their more pugnacious neighbours. Any coalition among Indian powers was equally difficult because each of them was more jealous of his natural ally than he was afraid of the enemy. Arthur Wellesley was not far wrong when he made the following statement. "The Asiatic governments do not acknowledge and hardly know.....rules and systems. Their governments are arbitrary, the objects of their policy are always shifting, they have no regular established system, the effect of which is to protect the weak against the strong; on the contrary the object of each of them separately and of all of them collectively, is to destroy the weak; and if by chance they should by a sense of common danger be induced for a season to combine their efforts for their mutual defence, the combination lasts only so long as it is attended with success; the first reverse dissolves it; and at all events it is dissolved long before the danger ceases, the apprehension of which originally caused it."¹

¹ Owen: *Selections from Wellesley's Despatches*, p. 295.

The advantages of successful diplomacy were always seen in the operations that followed. Thus in the Third Mysore War, the Company acquired a success against Tipoo which would have been impossible but for the diplomatic success at the beginning of the war, which enabled the British forces to gain the help of the allied cavalry. So essential was this cavalry that Malet wrote as follows: "I should look on the war as virtually ended on hearing that 18,000 of the allied cavalry from whatever quarter they come had joined your army and had proved their resolution to act up to the emergency as they would at all times make you master of your supplies from our own and our allies' country, while those of the enemy would soon become precarious in his own exhausted country." Similarly, before the Second Maratha War the forethought and military sagacity of British diplomacy enabled the Company to acquire supply bases and points of strategic importance, on the line of advance against the future enemy. This is particularly noticeable in the war against the Marathas. By virtue of a successful diplomatic manoeuvre, the British obtained the support of the Gaekwar and the Southern Jahgirdar together with a subsidiary alliance with the Peshwa. This success immediately placed the Company in a favourable strategic position vis-a-vis Sindia. Due to this advantage the bases acquired by the

Company at Poona and in Gujrath enabled it to take rapid offensive action against Sindia's territories and deprive him, within a short time of the commencement of hostilities of two most important of his possessions—namely Ahmednagar and Baroach. The Company ensured the benevolent neutrality of the Maratha Jahgirdars in southern Maratha country partly by diplomacy and partly by the show of military pressure in the form of a contingent on the Tungbhadra. The attitude of these Jahgirdars was important for the successful prosecution of the war, because their possessions lay across the line of communications of the British army, with its great supply base at Seringapatam. The friendship which these Jahgirdars maintained towards the Company, during the Second Maratha war helped the British in two important ways: (a) They gave protection to the convoys of supplies which passed through their territories to the British army, and (b) they kept tranquillity in the territories in the rear of these armies.

2. *A monopoly of sea-power in Indian waters*

The possessions of the Company lay along the sea-coasts of India, because they were primarily a sea-power. But their military operations on the Indian Peninsula were no less benefited by this sea-power. With the command of the sea in their

hands, the British could reinforce any of their coastal possessions with the least possible delay and without danger of interference from any other power. This enabled them to economise on their standing army which would have had to be much larger, if the movements of their armies had not been facilitated by an uninterrupted possession of sea-power. The British hemmed in the Indian powers and interrupted any communication that the Indian powers may have had with other Europeans. The most effective use of sea-power is seen in the Mysore Wars, when the Bombay army was landed on the Malabar Coast, and by an amphibious operation helped towards the early fall of Seringpatam.

3. *An efficient organisation for maintaining communication supplies*

The Company possessed an organisation for the maintenance and improvement of its communications much superior to that of the enemy. In fact, since the Company's forces well understood the importance of communications and an uninterrupted flow of supplies to the army in the field, they gave great attention to the bullock-department, to the escort for supplies and to the fortification of advanced supply-bases. The importance of communications in war is well expressed by Napoleon's dictum that the secret of war lies

in the communications. We do not, therefore, find the armies of the Company advancing beyond the limits, which the efficiency of its communications dictated, except in the famous case of Monsoon. The great efficiency of the Company in maintaining and facilitating the lines of communications may be illustrated by the following examples:—

(a) Tipoo, who possessed an efficient cavalry was expected to let it loose on the Karnatak, to ravage the territory and intercept the convoys of the Company. In order to ensure safe communications, the Company improved the roads, particularly in the frontier regions and the bases of supplies which maintained an advancing army, were well fortified in order to frustrate any attempt on the part of the enemy to destroy them and endanger the security of the forces, in the field. Further, the villages in the frontier districts were fortified to prevent their falling a prey to the predatory and destructive excursions of the enemy's irregular horse.

(b) But the most striking example of the efficiency of the Company's communications is to be seen in the careful provision that the Company made for boats and building of pontoon bridges. This enabled the heavily armed forces of the Company to cross swollen rivers with ease, while the Marathas with only an improvised and intermittent supply of boats, and due to general inability

to construct bridges, were unable particularly with their cavalry to manoeuvre across swollen rivers.

4. *The powerful artillery of the British*

Undoubtedly, a powerful artillery consisting of field-pieces and galloper-guns gave the Company's troops an enormous advantage over their opponents on the field of battle. But what was of even greater importance was that its siege-train and heavy guns enabled it to reduce fortresses and fortified places, and there was no fortification in India, with the possible exception of Bharatpur, which seriously baffled the military skill of the British for any length of time. One of the most striking facts of British history in India is that the fortresses failed to play the enormously important role, against the British, which they had repeatedly and so successfully played against all other armies in Indian history. Before the coming of the British in India as a political power, forts whether natural or constructed had played a decisive part in Indian military operations. The part, which the Deccan hill-forts played in the rise of Maratha power by baffling the military skill of the Moghuls has already been pointed out. Of course, most Indian forts were of poor construction and were not very formidable as fortification, but even badly constructed embattlements, weak ramparts and patched

up stone-walls of a fort had proved sufficiently strong to withstand determined onslaughts by Indian armies. In spite of their skill in taking a fort or defending one in their possession, the Marathas had failed to make any contribution to the art of military fortification. The real cause of the historic strength of Indian forts was the great ignorance of the art of siege among the Indians and the lack of adequate armament in their armies for breaching walls either by a preliminary bombardment or by well-constructed mines. The historic role of Indian forts was:

(a) In the reduction of these forts, the enemy wasted considerable time and resources in men and material. Since the defence of these forts was comparatively easy even for a small garrison as long as it was invested by the old Indian armies, the defenders inflicted great loss on the enemy at trifling cost. It took Aurangzeb several months to take a single Maratha fort by storm.

(b) It became a centre for rallying for all those who wanted to resist the enemy. It acted as a base to organise detachments for the purpose of harassing isolated enemy posts, billets occupying the country, and still more important, to attack the convoys and supplies of the enemy and to break off his communications with his own country or any other base of supply he may have established.

The Indian forts, however, could no longer

perform these vital traditional functions when they had to face the attack of the English. The English took most of the forts with the greatest ease, either by a breach in the walls made by a preliminary bombardment and then storming the fort or by an escalade. The chief reasons for this failure of the forts were the following: (a) The British possessed a powerful artillery, which was very effective against the inadequate fortifications of most of these forts and since these forts possessed no artillery of their own comparable to that of the enemy, British artillery had full play against the forts, without fear of being silenced by enemy batteries. (b) The forts were simply constructed and depended for their strength in early days more on the natural strength of the situation, than on any engineering skill of those who constructed them. In fact, the art of military fortification was very primitive in India. This led to an important consequence, because the Indians were deprived thereby of a base for rallying and support which is absolutely essential for a dogged and guerilla resistance. (c) The forts were quite important to break off communications. This was due to two reasons—Firstly, the powerful escort which the British provided for their convoys made it impossible for the fort garrison on account of its weakness to detach parties of so great a strength as to intercept those convoys. Wellington's opi-

nion on the question whether Indian fortresses could interrupt communications is quite emphatic. He said: "no fortress is an impediment to the operations of a hostile army in this country, excepting it lies immediately in the line on which the army must necessarily march or excepting it is provided with a garrison of such strength and activity as to afford detachments to operate upon the line of communications of the hostile army with its own country."¹ The chief advantage of these forts consisted in the power that they had on the country surrounding it. Secondly, the lines of communications of the enemy's forces in the field were less vulnerable than those of a corresponding army in Europe, because the armies of the Company were more self-sufficient in magazines and stores than those in Europe. The Company's armies on active service carried vast quantities of supplies in the movable depots with them and had their own magazines, which made them independent of temporary supply bases and magazines on the line of advance behind them. The principal depots, therefore, were not in the rear of the army but at Madras or Seringpatam. This enabled the Company to march greater distances into the hostile countries than would have

¹ Gurwood: *Wellington's Despatches*, (New Ed.), Vol. I, p. 353.


been possible, under conditions of warfare prevalent in Europe. This made the task of Indian forts more difficult, because in the absence of temporary magazines and depots behind the lines of the enemy, they found fewer objectives to attack in order to break off the lines of communications. If temporary supply-bases did not exist, they could not profitably be attacked. In defending the claims of Seringpatam as the chief supply-base of operations in the Peninsula, Arthur Wellesley observed: "In European warfare it is absolutely necessary that the expense magazines, etc., should be on the spot; and they are usually moved forward in proportion as the army is enabled to advance. But in this country in which the armies take the field with such formidable equipments, with arsenals and magazines, which they always carry with them, it is not necessary however convenient it would be, that the depot which is to supply those equipments, and the want of the service should be immediately in the neighbourhood of the scene of action."¹

5. *The equipment and discipline of the Company's forces*

In discipline and equipment, the armies of the Company were decidedly superior to the Indian

¹ Gurwood : *Wellington's Despatches*, (New Ed.). Vol. I, p. 349.

armies opposing them. The musketry and artillery produced a fire so deadly that the Indian forces had neither protection against it nor a reply to it. This enabled the armies of the Company always to take the initiative in attack and press it home with their well-disciplined cavalry. On the other hand, the lack of proper discipline among Indian forces made it difficult to rally them or to nerve them to a dogged and prolonged resistance. Further, Indian armies throughout history had been preponderantly cavalry forces. But Indian cavalry in the war against the British, does not appear to have done everything that could be expected of it. This was due partly to the fact that Indian cavalry forces always remained irregular and ill-disciplined and were neglected generally by most Indian powers after the eighties of the eighteenth century and partly because after the experiences of the armies of Cornwallis in the Third Mysore War, the Company raised a well-disciplined cavalry arm, which it did not possess before. The possession of a cavalry arm improved the military efficiency of the Company's armies immensely. The irregular horse of the Indian powers could no longer come near enough to harass the main forces of the British, and was henceforth useless to intercept the convoys. The battle of Fategarh fought against Holkar showed that in a purely cavalry combat, the cavalry of the Company was



more than a match for the best Indian cavalry. Similarly an efficient cavalry enabled the British forces to destroy utterly the defeated forces of Sindia and Bhosle after the battle of Argaum.

CHAPTER VIII

THE MILITARY WEAKNESSES OF INDIAN STATES

Though the military arm of the Company was formidable, it does not entirely explain the rapid success of the British in India. The Indian forces of the Indian powers show a definitely defective military organisation and an inferior military science. This was an important cause of the easy British conquest of India. The military weaknesses of Indian states can be well illustrated by reference to the Fourth Mysore War and the Second Maratha War. Tipoo Sultan was destroyed in two months and the entire fabric of Maratha power was crushed beyond repair within three years of the Treaty of Bassein. These were ranked first-rate Indian powers and the fact that such powerful states were destroyed in so short a time, requires an explanation.

The reasons for Tipoo's defeat

The history of the Four Mysore Wars shows how the power of Mysore became militarily less effective, as the end of the century approached.

In the Second Mysore War when it was at its zenith, Hydar Ali's plan of operations was as follows: He refused to accept battle and contented himself by ravaging all Karnatak and by destroying grain and forage for miles round the British army. The lack of supplies so circumscribed the line of effective advance and the range of their operations, that the British could make very little impression on Hydar. They were handicapped because while Hydar's forces consisted principally of cavalry, the British had no cavalry, with which either to protect their convoys or to compel Hydar to a cavalry combat. In the Third Mysore War, Cornwallis was reduced to sore distress for want of grain and forage. "It is sufficient to say, that we are reduced to difficulties for grain and forage, from the villages having been burnt for several miles round us by the enemy's horse"¹—so Cornwallis wrote. In spite of the capture of several towns and forts, for want of a cavalry, Cornwallis could not obtain supplies in order to maintain a siege of Seringpatam. In fact but for the allied cavalry Cornwallis would have had to give up the war against Tipoo. But in the Fourth Mysore War, the British possessed a cavalry arm and this considerably reduced the effectiveness of Tipoo's light cavalry. British military efficiency had, therefore, considerably

¹ *Poona Residency Correspondence*, Vol. III, pp. 355-56.

improved within a decade by the addition of the cavalry arm. However, the total defeat of Tipoo was due also to tactical mistake and a wrong handling of forces. His mistakes could be grouped under these heads:

Firstly, the Company's Madras army was able to cross the frontier and take Seringpatam within three months of the declaration of war, because in the long march from the frontier to Seringpatam, it was not delayed by the necessity of having to take any well-fortified places such as Bangalore, which would have prolonged the campaign for two seasons and would have made the task of the Company's forces far more difficult. Secondly, in his solicitude for the safety of his guns, Tipoo did not use them fully for the support of his infantry. Referring to the action at Malvelly, Arthur Wellesley wrote as follows regarding Tipoo's handling of his guns and infantry: "His troops behaved better than they have ever been known to behave. His infantry advanced and almost stood the charge of bayonets of the 33rd, and his cavalry rode at Gen. Baird's European brigade. He did not support them as he ought, having drawn off his guns, at the moment we made our attack and even pushed forward these troops to cover the retreat of his guns."¹ Thirdly, Tipoo failed to make proper

¹ Owen : *Selections from Wellington's Despatches*, p. 62.

use of his light cavalry, which was "the best of its kind in the world." Mill was substantially right when he said "he never could forget the manner in which his father had triumphed over a host of enemies by shutting himself up in his capital and defending himself till the season of the rains; nor had all the experience of the facility with which Europeans overcame the strongest defences in his power to rear, yielded on this point any decisive instruction. The principal part of his preparation for war had consisted in adding to the works of Seringpatam and storing it with provision for a seige. With the attempt to disable the Bombay army, the idea of even obstructing the march of the invaders, if not altogether abandoned, was very feebly pursued; and till the English were upon the ramparts, he could not persuade himself that the fort of Seringpatam could be taken. His grand military mistake is acknowledged to have been the neglect of his cavalry, a proper use of which would have rendered the conquering of him a far more arduous task." (Mill: History of India (Ed. Wilson). Vol. VI, p. 147).

The reasons for Maratha defeats

In the First Maratha War, the Marathas fought in a manner generally known as the Parthian, after

these who thus destroyed Crassus. It consisted in retiring before the enemy and tempting him to follow and thereby extend his line of communication, until on account of the constant harassing of the light horse, his provisions failed and he began a retreat. As soon as he commenced to retreat, he was to be attacked with all available forces of all arms. The enemy being in a hurry to retreat could not attack and, therefore, fell an easy prey. During the First Maratha War, the Bombay army which reached Talegaon on its march to Poona, found that its provisions failed and was attacked by the Marathas as soon as it started its retreat, with the effect that the entire force had to surrender. Proceeding to Poona seemed hazardous. "Our situation would rather prove worse than better as we advanced towards Poona by being cut off from communication with the Konkan, from whence we may now be supplied with provision and stores. The mode adopted by the enemy of retiring before us and ravaging the country seems to render.....the reasoning apparently just."¹ But the retreat was equally disastrous. "We fell back with the army to this place yesterday morning and the enemy having by some means got intelligence of our moving attacked us on the march

¹ Forrest: *Selections from State Papers, (Maratha series)*, p. 358.

before daylight, which they continued with great vigour until 2 o'clock in the afternoon. Their numerous bodies of cavalry rendered it impossible to protect our baggage, a part of which consequently fell in their hands."¹ In the campaign in Gujrat Sindhia adopted the same tactics against Goddard. "I am anxious to accomplish a surprise attack because from the nature of his army and the mode of war he practises, I neither can approach near enough to attack him suddenly with advantage nor will he risk the hazard of meeting me openly in the field. If I advance he will certainly retreat and to think of pursuing him beyond his present encampment would not be the means of bringing on a decisive action nor could it be attended with any real or solid benefit."²

The causes of Maratha defeats, during the Second Maratha War, show that British success was due not only to the fighting efficiency of the British forces, but also due to an inferior generalship and organisation on the Maratha side. These causes were as follows:

(a) *The season of the operations favoured British forces.*³ The Company having taken the initia-

¹ Forrest: *Selections from State Papers, (Maratha series)*, p. 367.

² Forrest: *Selections from State Papers, (Maratha series)*, Vol. I, p. 407.

³ Gurwood: *Wellington's Despatches, (New Ed.)*, Vol. I, pp. 357-365.

tive in declaring war possessed an advantage for starting the operations and naturally chose the season of the year which very much handicapped the Maratha forces. The Indian powers most unwisely left the choice of the season in which to commence the operations to the Company. The British declared the Fourth Mysore War in March and captured Seringpatam in May, because in case they had waited longer to declare war, the Malabar Monsoon would have made it impossible to capture Seringpatam in one campaign. But the British deliberately chose Monsoon months—June to September—to commence war against the Marathas. This was in curious contrast to the Maratha war tradition, who always began their military expeditions after the harvest-gathering in October. Arthur Wellesley was so anxious to commence the war in the monsoon months, that he precipitated the war with Sindhia and Bhosle on the 6th August. The advantages he hoped to acquire thereby were considerable. The arm which the British feared most in the Maratha army was the Maratha irregular horse. During the monsoons the numerous rivers in the Deccan filled and could not be passed by cavalry. The British army on the other hand could easily pass them, because they could construct pontoon bridges and had provided for boats. The sphere in which Maratha cavalry could operate was therefore seriously

circumscribed during the rainy season. By commencing the war in the monsoon months, the British immobilised the most powerful arm in the Maratha forces. Maratha country is dry and barren and does not afford much water except during the rainy season. During months other than the rainy season, all rivers and most of the tanks run dry. The forces of the Company would have been seriously handicapped for want of water, had the war started in other months. Finally, rainy months were the only ones when forage was available in large quantities, for the bullocks and horses, in the Deccan.

(b) *The absence of well-fortified towns and the lack of prepared defence positions.* The rapid fall of Maratha resistance was due to a total lack of fortified towns and positions throughout the Maratha country. A few of the walled towns like Ahmednagar were so weakly fortified and garrisoned that they were taken by the forces of the Company within a matter of few days. Most of the towns were liable to be taken by assault and there was nothing except the army in the field to check the career of conquest of the enemy. In fact, in spite of their military talent, the Marathas took no precaution for a general defence of the country, a convincing proof of the decay of vigour and military spirit in the nation. In the absence of such places of strength round which the resistance

of the Marathas could rally and harden, the British army could concentrate on finding the Maratha army and defeating it in battle. The British did not have to dissipate their strength in reducing strong defence works in the enemy's country.

(c) Even from the point of view purely of military science, the direction and command of the Maratha forces was defective. The army was not handled properly. The Marathas fought the war by remaining on the defensive, a fault which Tipoo also committed in the Fourth Mysore War. Even in the battles fought, the tactical initiative was left to the British. Thus instead of advancing into the territories of the Peshwa, where he might have won the Southern Jahgirdars on to his side, Sindhia merely made a demonstrative advance, into the country of the Nizam. With reference to this, A. Wellesley wrote as follows to Lieut. Gen. Stuart: "It is very probable, however, that in case Sindhia should advance towards Poona, the Jahgirdars would at best become neutral and would return to the southward under various pretences; and if there should be nothing to check their enterprises, their neutrality would soon degenerate into enmity."¹ Sindhia did not even take a vigorous offensive into the

¹ Gurwood : *Wellington's Despatches*, (New Ed.), Vol. I, p. 536.

territories of the Nizam, either with his entire army or what he should have done, only with his cavalry. Even regarding the time and manner of the commencement of the battles, between the British and Sindhia, the initiative remained with the Company. No doubt the Marathas as a rule occupied a strong ground, but beyond the natural difficulty of the place, they made no attempt whatsoever to improve it so as to make the attack of the Company a costly failure. Maratha generalship displayed a total lack of resourcefulness. At the battle of Assaye, for instance, though the Marathas occupied strong ground, they made no attempt to offer battle until they were themselves attacked. Besides, they were so careless as to leave the ford of Peeplegaum on the river Kaitna unoccupied. Had they occupied it, Arthur Wellesley would have found it difficult to attack them.

Of course the most glaring defect of the handling of the Maratha army was their failure to use their cavalry, which had once become famous throughout India, for its élan and enterprise. Thus we find that Sindhia's cavalry could have attacked the baggage of Arthur Wellesley's army when he left it improperly guarded for an attack on Sindhia at Assaye. Similarly, throughout the Maratha war, the cavalry failed to attack the convoys of the enemy and made no attempts to carry a predatory war into the territories of the Company.

Collin Campbell, who fought at the battle of Assaye, has given the following opinion, in his account of the battle: "If the numerous cavalry of the enemy had done their duty I hardly think it possible we would have succeeded."¹

Europeanisation of the Maratha Army

Thus the failure of the Marathas and the Indian powers generally may be said to be due to the military efficiency of the Company's forces, and the inefficient leadership of the Indian forces. Bad leadership there undoubtedly was and the civil war had weakened the Marathas and particularly had it reduced the power of Sindhia. The Company certainly was powerful and the possession of a regular and disciplined cavalry enabled it to maintain a sustained offensive action, which gave no respite to the Marathas to recoup and rally. However, those who had thought about these matters and many of those who fought the Marathas in the Second Maratha war argue, that the chief cause of the failure of the Marathas consisted in the policy adopted by them of training infantry battalions and maintaining a heavy train of artillery, to fight the war on a European model. The Marathas it was said had a genius for predatory and guerilla war and not for pitched infantry battles

¹ Owen: *Wellington's Despatches*, p. 304.

and therefore they committed a great blunder in training their army in infantry battalions by European officers. The opinion of so great a soldier as Arthur Wellesley subscribed to the same view. He was so convinced of this that he wanted to encourage the Marathas to take Europeans in their service and maintain infantry and artillery since it would in his opinion make the task of the the British to defeat the Maratha armies, easier. His statement was as follows: "Sindhia's armies had actually been brought to a very favourable state of discipline and his power had become formidable, by the exertions of European officers in his service; but I think it is much to be doubted, whether his power or rather that of the Maratha nation, would not have been more formidable, at least to the British Government, if they had never had an European in their service, and had carried on their operations in the manner of the original Marathas, only by means of cavalry. I have no doubt whatever that the military spirit of the nation has been destroyed by their establishment of infantry and artillery, possibly indeed by other causes; at all events it is certain that those establishments, however formidable afford us a good object of attack in a war with the Marathas, and the destruction of them contributes to the success of contest and to the re-establishment of peace, because having made them the principal ob-

ject of their attention (which they must do in order to have them at all) and that part of their strength on which they place most reliance, they become also the principal reliance of the army; and therefore they are lost the cavalry as in the case of this war will not act.”¹ Thomas Munro, who could speak on military affairs with authority, was also of the same opinion. About Sindhia’s infantry he wrote: “Its discipline, its arms and uniform clothing, I regard merely as the means of dressing it out for the sacrifice. Its numerous artillery prevents it from escaping by rapid marches; it is forced to fight deserted by its cavalry and slaughtered with very little loss on our side. Sindhia, by abandoning the old system of Maratha warfare and placing his chief dependence on disciplined infantry facilitated the conquest of the states of Polygars and Rajas, whose forts and jungles might have secured them against his horse; but he at the same time disabled himself from maintaining a contest with us, for he reduced the war to a war of battles and sieges, instead of one of marches and convoys. As long as his battalions are not under French influence, by being commanded by officers of that nation, it is more in our interest that he should keep them up than he should disband

¹ Gurwood: *Wellington’s Despatches*, (New Ed.), Vol. II, pp. 318-19.

them and raise horse.”¹ By this policy of europeanising their armies, the Marathas lost the greatest advantage that their former armies possessed, namely mobility and ability to avoid staking their all in a few pitched battles. They altogether neglected cavalry—that arm of defence which had served them so well for over a century. Munro was quite emphatic about it, “the introduction of a great body regular infantry, with a vast train of artillery, had made his (Sindia’s) army unwieldy, and in order to keep up the foot, the cavalry was neglected. They were deficient in number and quality and as they were considered only a secondary corps to the infantry, they had lost all their spirit of enterprise. They gave very little support to their infantry in the different battles that were fought, and they attempted nothing alone. They fell in during the campaign with several convoys and though the escort were but inconsiderable, they did not cut off one of them.”²

With this in mind Arthur Wellesley gave quite interesting advice to Col. Stevenson regarding the manner in which a war against Sindia, who had powerful guns and a semi-disciplined infantry should be conducted. He wrote: “Do not attack their position, because they always take up such as are confoundedly strong and difficult of access;

¹ Owen : *Selections from Wellesley’s Despatches*, p. 792.

² Owen : *Selections from Wellesley’s Despatches*, p. 792.

for which the banks of numerous rivers and nullahs afford them every facility. Do not remain in your position, however strong it may be or however well you may have entrenched it; but when you shall hear that they are on their march to attack you, secure your baggage and move out of your camp. You will find them in the common disorder of march; they will not have time to form, which being but half-disciplined troops, is necessary for them. At all events you will have the advantage of making the attack on ground, which they will not have chosen for the battle; a part of their troops only will be engaged; and it is possible that you will gain an easy victory.”¹

Holkar's successes and the correct military policy

This general explanation does not, however, fit the facts, because the above-mentioned criticism of the Maratha army's europeanised organisation is based on the assumption that Maratha national power was raised and maintained on the remarkable exploits of their excellent cavalry. In Shivaji's armies, which were at once the source and inspiration of the subsequent growth of Maratha greatness, the infantry showed a definite preponderance over his cavalry. Shivaji held his 240 forts

¹ Gurwood : *Wellington's Despatches*, (New Ed.), Vol. II, pp. 403-4.

with his infantry and used his cavalry—no doubt an excellent one—as an auxiliary corps for predatory excursions and for interception of Moghul convoys. In fact, Maratha power was based during the years of its birth on a fleet-footed infantry and the hill-forts. The change in the composition of the Maratha armies came during Aurangzeb's invasion of the Deccan. After its failure and Aurangzeb's death there was little need to hold the hill-forts in strength, as the Maratha territories were no longer menaced. Thenceforth, the Marathas embarked on those chauth-collecting expeditions for which cavalry was the most suitable instrument, particularly because the Marathas did not intend to occupy the territories their cavalry overran. During the years roughly, from 1700 to 1750 Maratha armies were almost entirely composed of cavalry. After the middle of the 18th century, however, a new change began in their armies. Most of the Maratha sardars who had large armies under their independent command began to feel the need for occupying the territories their armies overran every year. Besides, it was found that walled towns and fortified places could not be reduced by an army consisting purely of cavalry. "His (Mahadji's) genius saw that to realise his plans, the mere predatory hordes of the Marathas could never prove adequate. It was a circle of plunder and as one country was exhausted the army had to

march with numbers increased by those whose condition their success had made desperate, to ravage another. They had in their first excursions little or no means of reducing forts; nor did their system of war admit of protracted hostilities in a difficult country and against a resolute enemy. These wants were early discovered by their enemies. The Bheels from their mountains and the Rajputs and others from their strongholds (which were multiplied by fortifying every village) not only resisted but retorted upon the Marathas by laying waste their lands, the wrongs they had suffered. This evil was only to be remedied by a regular force.”¹

There is, therefore, no doubt that one of the important causes of Maratha defeats was their faulty military science and inferior leadership. Europeanisation in itself was not such a cause. The chief defect of this europeanisation was that it made European officers indispensable and did not aim at keeping them temporarily for purposes of training Indian officers, to take the place permanently of Europeans. Further, the military science of the europeanised Indian forces did not evolve, while the British made considerable improvement in theirs. “The native princes had

¹ J. Malcolm : *Memoir of Central India and Malwa*, Vol. II, pp. 126-127.

trained sepoys in European tactics; and to maintain a superiority over them it became necessary that the native army of the Company's government should make further advances in the military art, which they were enabled to do not only from the great improvements, which had taken place in that science in Europe, and from the example furnished by some of the king's regiments sent to India, but from the number of officers of liberal education and respectable character."¹

However, Holkar's successes show that a more scientific military policy might have resulted in greater success to Maratha arms. A brief account of Monson's defeat will best illustrate the military policy, which the Marathas ought to have followed in their war against the British. At the beginning of the War, Holkar was near Ajmer, but as soon as he found that the British Commander-in-chief advanced towards him with a large force, he rapidly retreated with his whole army towards Malwa, where he plundered a town belonging to Sindhia. He retreated over two hundred miles and the British found it impossible to keep pace with him. In the meanwhile, Monson with a force of five battalions, suitable artillery and 5,000 irregular horse, advanced upon him from Kotah. Monson

¹ Malcolm: *Memoir of Central India and Malwa*, Vol. II, p. 229.

passed the Mucundra Ghat and came upon the river Chumbal. However his provisions failed and he had only two days supply left with him. Holkar immediately crossed the Chumbal and destroyed Monson's cavalry, after which he began a more than two hundred miles pursuit of Monson's infantry, until not more than a few stragglers were left of the entire army of Monson. The tactics of Holkar resembled in all detail to those employed by the Marathas in the First Maratha War and with equal success. They have been described earlier. Later, however, Holkar did not benefit by his experience and good luck. He followed up his successes into the territories held by the Company and exposed the whole of his forces to the hazard of battle as Sindia had done before him. The consequence was, that he was overcome in the cavalry battle of Fategarh and in the infantry battle of Deig. The correct military policy for the Marathas would have been to avoid general action for as long a time as it was possible for them. They could have used their numerous cavalry to harass the enemy on his march, to attack his convoys and baggage, to intercept his communications generally and to make surprise predatory dashes into the enemy country. They would thus have been able to wear out the heavily armed infantry forces of the Company. The cavalry of the Company was also

like its infantry far too much encumbered with baggage and heavy equipment to prove serious menace to Maratha light cavalry, which did not intend to precipitate a general action. In this manner the Marathas could have avoided a pitched war altogether, until such time as it suited them to attack. Arthur Wellesley benefited by the experience of Monson, points this out very well. The army of the Marathas "is light and chiefly composed of cavalry; the whole composition of our army is heavy; even our cavalry from the nature of their constitution and equipments and owing to the food eaten by the horses, are not able to march with greater celerity for any length of time than our infantry. His (Marathas) troops and his (Marathas) horses subsist on the grain, the produce of the country. Our troops come from countries the general produce of which is rice; they and even their followers must have a certain quantity of that grain; and the horses of the cavalry must likewise have a grain not the general produce of the Maratha country, which in addition to the inconvenience of boiling it, must be brought from a distance."¹ Thus on account of equipment as well as the necessity of bringing large supplies unobtainable in the Deccan from a distance, the speed and range of operations of the forces of the

¹ Owen : *Selections from Wellington's Despatches*, p. 414.

Company would have been small. The Marathas under the circumstances could have easily prolonged the war and could have thereby worn out the enemy by refusing to stake everything on the uncertain arbitration of an early engagement.

Sindia should not have brought his semi-disciplined infantry to an offensive action at the outset of the war, far away from its base in Hindustan. His strategy should rather have been to leave the infantry behind in the heart of his territories in northern India and carry on a guerilla offensive and predatory war in the country of the Company and its allies. He should have advanced with his cavalry alone, but as soon as the enemy was weakened by his harassing and had advanced far from his base of supplies the infantry should have been brought forward to an enemy already retreating on account of the failure of supplies. Arthur Wellesley has admirably summarised the tactics of the Marathas, used in the defeat of Monson. He wrote: "There are two modes in which the Marathas carry on their operations—they operate upon supplies by means of their cavalry; and after they have created distress in their camp, which obliges the army to commence a retreat, they press upon it with all their infantry and their powerful artillery. Their opponent being pressed for provisions is obliged to hurry his march and they have no fear of being attacked. They follow him with their

cavalry in his marches and surround and attack him with their infantry and cannon, when he halts and he can scarcely escape from them.”¹ This method was so effective against the British that not only was Monson’s force destroyed but it compelled Murray to retreat precipitately as well.

Uncontested British victories

The above discussion makes it clear that the Marathas were defeated militarily partly because of certain disadvantages that the Maratha armies laboured under, arising mainly from inferior leadership and faulty military policy. In spite of this, however, on account of its genius and tradition, the Maratha army ought to have given a better account of itself than it really gave. The Marathas did not really resist the British and both in the case of the Marathas as well as that of Tipoo Sultan, the British won cheap and easy victories. This is clear from the fact that the battles fought by the armies of these first-class Indian states were by no means sanguinary. We find that at the battle of Malvelly, the only serious engagement between the Madras army and Tipoo Sultan, the Company lost 7 or 8 killed and about forty wounded, obviously a trifling loss considering the impor-

¹ Gurwood : *Wellington’s Despatches*, (New Ed.), Vol. III, p. 464.

tance of the battle.¹ (Maj. Gen. Floyd to the Governor-General). Similarly at the battle of Assaye the losses of the Company were small considering the prestige of Sindia's forces and the importance of the battle for the whole future of the Empire. In this battle the total loss of the Co. Indian and European—was 435 killed and 1622 wounded, obviously not a formidable figure.² In the battle of Argaum, only 46 were killed and 308 were wounded from among those engaged on the side of the Company.³ The Indian armies clearly gave up the fight without contesting it doggedly and as soon as the British force attacked them by a charge on their positions. Thomas Munro's observation corroborates this: "His (Sindia's) infantry was regular enough, but it wanted steadiness, in which it must always be greatly inferior to ours.....At the battle of Assaye, the severest that took place in the course of the war, I do not recollect among all our killed and wounded officers one that suffered a musketball or bayonet, a convincing proof that the Maratha infantry made very little serious opposition."⁴

The insignificant moral value of the armies of the Indian states shows that Indian soldiers in

¹ Owen : *Selections from Wellesley's Despatches*, p. 122.

² Owen : *Selections from Wellington's Despatches*, p. 301.

³ Owen : *Selections from Wellington's Despatches*, p. 325.

⁴ Owen : *Selections from Wellesley's Despatches*, pp. 791-92.

these armies were not very much interested in the issue of the battle. Soldiers and armies fight with dogged persistence only when they believe that the issues they are fighting for are worth risking or even losing their lives. Indian armies of the 18th century had no philosophy, no idealism, no cause. The mercenary soldiers looked upon a lost battle as at worst a temporary loss of employment. The officers of these armies likewise did not look beyond their personal interests. The people of India did not support these armies because the armies and states of India at the end of the 18th century were not people's institutions. They preyed upon the people who only wanted to be left in peace. Hence the British never were really seriously challenged at all in their conquest of India.

CONCLUSION

At the time Wellesley left India, British paramountcy was an established fact. No doubt its consolidation took several decades more, but the main issues were settled by 1805-6. The clash of the three empires—namely, Moghul, Maratha, and the English is a very valuable epoch of Indian history. It was from the days of the Moghuls that Indian history becomes a continuous evolutionary process woven by the mighty thread of time, to a hitherto unforeseen destiny. It is from the clash

of these three empires that modern India emerges. The two chief historical conclusions reached in the foregoing study are as follows:—

Firstly, the Maratha ambition to imperial power was misguided. They destroyed their own nationality in an imperial adventure, which miscarried because it could not found a Hindu Empire in the absence of a Hindu nation.

Secondly, the British acquired sovereignty in India without much serious opposition. The sovereignty had lapsed and there were no heirs to the mantle of Akbar. British conquest was inevitable in view of the totally decayed military and political condition of India, during the 18th century and as shown by the subsequent history of India, was an eminently significant event.





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